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FISHER, ALBERT JAMES. A Production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little. (1975) Directed by: Miss Kathryn England. Pp. 107.

It was the purpose of this study to research, produce, and analyze the play And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little by Paul Zindel.

The research of the play involved tracing previous productions of the play, the author's background, and study of the play itself.

The production involved casting the play, assembling the crews and staging the play for performance on the mainstage of W. Raymond Taylor Theatre at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

The analysis involved evaluation of the finished performance in all areas of the production.

APPROVAL PAGE

A PRODUCTION OF AND MISS REARDON DRINKS A LITTLE

by

Albert James Fisher

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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Approved by

April 20, 1975
Date of Acceptance by Committee

Kathryn England
Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

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Life has lived in New York State and England. There where he was Playwright-Residence at the New York's City Theatre under a Ford Foundation grant.¹ Mr. Zindel is the author of The Effect of Ghosts on the World in the Year 1900, which garnered great critical acclaims off Broadway and won the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. It was subsequently made into a motion picture starring Faye Dunaway, an Academy Award nominee for her performance.²

Following And Now We Can Begin a Little, Zindel penned The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild which opened at the Ambassador Theatre in New York on November 14, 1971, starring Marjorie Stanger.³ It was not a success. Zindel also has written several novels and the plays Let Me Hear You Whisper and The Ladies Should Be in Bed and the

¹Paul Zindel, Let Me Hear You Whisper (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 2.

²Paul Zindel, The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild (New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1973), p. 2.

³Ibid.

CHAPTER I

ANALYSIS OF AND MISS REARDON DRINKS A LITTLEBackground of Playwright

Paul Zindel, author of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, was born on Staten Island, New York, and during his life has lived in New York State and Houston, Texas (where he was Playwright-in-Residence at Nina Vance's Alley Theatre under a Ford Foundation grant).¹ Mr. Zindel is the author of The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, which garnered great critical acclaim off-Broadway and won the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award. It was subsequently made into a motion picture starring Joanne Woodward, an Academy Award nominee for her performance.²

Following And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, Zindel penned The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild which opened at the Ambassador Theatre in New York on November 14, 1972, starring Maureen Stapleton.³ It was not a success. Zindel also has written several novels and the plays Let Me Hear You Whisper and The Ladies Should Be in Bed and the

¹Paul Zindel, Let Me Hear You Whisper (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 3.

²Paul Zindel, The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild (New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1973), p. 2.

³Ibid.

screenplays of Up the Sandbox and the musical comedy Mame, starring Lucille Ball.⁴

Paul Zindel must certainly be considered one of the foremost young playwrights in America today. Life magazine has said, "Certain qualities possessed by the young dramatist are in acutely short supply right now in American playwriting. Along with his craft and discipline, Zindel has metaphysical juices in his writing that are life-restoring rather than life-reducing."⁵

Background of Play

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was Paul Zindel's first play to be produced on Broadway. It followed the very successful The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, an off-Broadway production which has won numerous awards.

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little opened on February 25, 1971, at the Morosco Theatre in New York. It was produced through the combined efforts of James B. McKenzie, Spofford J. Beadle, Seth L. Schapiro, Kenneth Waissman, and Maxine Fox. The production was directed by Melvin Bernhardt with scenery by Fred Voelpel, lights by Martin Aronstein, and costumes by Sara Brook. The cast, which was to be the only consistently praised element of the production, included: Estelle

⁴Zindel, Let Me Hear You Whisper, p. 6.

⁵Ibid.

Parsons as Catherine Reardon, Julie Harris as Anna Reardon, Nancy Marchand as Ceil Adams, Rae Allen as Fleur Stein (Miss Allen won an Antionette Perry ("Tony") Award as Best Supporting Actress for her performance), Bill Macy as Bob Stein, Virginia Payne as Mrs. Pentrano, and Paul Lieber as the Delivery Boy.⁶ And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was discussed in The Best Plays of 1970-71 as follows:

Paul Zindel too was contemplating lost ladies in his And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, a study of three sisters, all school teachers, one married, one (not the drinker) more than a little neurotic, all somewhat alienated from reality, which finally invades their privacy in the form of the married couple downstairs. Zindel won the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for last season's off-Broadway The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds; in his second produced play of the season the passion is all there but the play not quite, though it enjoyed an extraordinarily capable ensemble of performances including those of Estelle Parsons (as the drinking Miss Reardon), Julie Harris as the neurotic and Nancy Marchand as the married one, the take charge type.⁷

Critical Reviews

The response of the critics in New York to the Broadway production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was very mixed. There was not a single complete rave of the play and the most highly praised feature of the production was the acting. As far as the play itself goes, the humorous aspects seemed to be most often lauded and otherwise, the play was regarded as flawed.

⁶Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., The Best Plays of 1970-71 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1971), p. 308.

⁷Ibid., p. 15.

For example, Alfred L. Malabre, Jr. writing for the Wall Street Journal says:

But despite bright spots, the play remains frustratingly static. At one point near the end of the first act, after Anna has frightened Ceil by shooting off some blanks from an old pistol, Catherine comments: "That noise might have been just what we needed." Unfortunately, a good deal more is needed--a plot that moves along, character development, insights for the audience. One senses that even Mr. Zindel appreciated the problem when, as the final curtain begins to fall, Anna asks Catherine: "What in the world are you waiting for?" Catherine, commitment papers in hand, doesn't reply. What was Mr. Zindel waiting for? Altogether, it is a disappointing endeavor by a playwright who clearly possesses ability.⁸

Disappointment in the production was discussed by other critics, such as Richard Watts for the New York Post:

The second is the tough one for the new playwright. Paul Zindel's The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds was a brilliant play that marked its author as one of the oncoming men of the American theatre. But his new work, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, which opened last night at the Morosco, shows little of the notable talent that went into its predecessor and I must sadly report that it seemed to me a serious disappointment.⁹

The excellent use of humor in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was pointed out by Douglas Watt, critic for the New York Daily News:

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little is a steadily interesting, very funny and oddly unrealized piece of work. Zindel's approach to this is a little like Tennessee Williams on a laughing jag. He can't stop with the jokes, which is just as well since they make whatever evening there is, and he can't make up his mind where to place his sympathy.¹⁰

⁸Wall Street Journal, 1 March 1971.

⁹New York Post, 26 February 1971.

¹⁰New York Daily News, 26 February 1971.

Clive Barnes in the New York Times mentioned several of the flaws he noticed in the play:

This is the situation, and Mr. Zindel decides not to develop it but to describe it. The sisters at the end remain much as they were at the beginning, and despite dramatic relief from outside characters, there is no progress, no movement. Mr. Zindel places all on the characters of his sisters, and it is not enough. He is trying to write in a manner composed partly of Arthur Miller's style of post-Ibsenite skeletons in the domestic cupboard, and partly of Neil Simon's brittle and hurt wit. But here he is neither as interesting as Mr. Miller nor as invigorating as Mr. Simon. Too many jokes fall flat--who can be expected to laugh at a verbal mix-up between Lebanon and Lesbians?--and throughout the whole play there is a pervading air of unreality. It is difficult to believe in what these people say to one another. And at the end, Mr. Zindel can hardly conclude his play and the curtain falls with an unhealthy air of apology.¹¹

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little did, however, receive some positive critical response. Jack Kroll, critic for Newsweek, seemed to like the production a great deal:

In Paul Zindel we seem to have that rarity--a playwright who can write intelligent, sensitive, entertaining plays for a wide public. After the off-Broadway success of his The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, he brings to Broadway And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, a deceptively simple but sharply observed play about three Irish-American sisters whose careers as school teachers can no longer mask the anguish of their lives. Zindel not only makes this touching, true and very funny with a real craftsman's hand, he also writes terrific parts for actresses, and Julie Harris, Estelle Parsons, Nancy Marchand, and Rae Allen take full advantage of this, especially Miss Parsons, tense and wry and lovely as the drinking Miss Reardon. If this play doesn't succeed Broadway is even sicker than anyone supposes.¹²

¹¹New York Times, 26 February 1971.

¹²Newsweek, 8 March 1971.

In Time magazine, T. E. Kalem made comparisons between Zindel and two of America's foremost playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller:

There are two main dramatic uses of the memory. One is retributive, and the other is alchemistic. In retributive memory, the playwright squares accounts with the past, attempting to wrest present justice from past injustice. Arthur Miller's The Price is a perfect example. In alchemistic drama, the goal is to transmute the heavy base metals of the past into present lyric gold, as Tennessee Williams did in The Glass Menagerie. Generally speaking, the main thrust of retributive drama is moral, and that of alchemistic drama is aesthetic. While Paul Zindel is not on a writing par with Miller or Williams, he and his characters have a joint account, both retributive and alchemistic, and draw most of their dramatic funds from the memory bank. In his new play, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, Zindel seems to be overdrawn at the memory bank. His wacky humor is present, along with his abrupt pathos, a way he has of pulling the rug out from under the heart, and his frequently well-honed dialogue. But under it all, the plot, point, and purpose and direction of the play seem to have been lost.¹³

Production Style

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little is a relatively short three-act comedy. This director feels tentative about applying the word comedy to this play because of the tragic nature of the characters and their problems. However, this director's initial response to the play was to note its similarity to the plays of Neil Simon in dialogue and characterization, although in the case of Neil Simon, the characters of his women are notoriously one-dimensional (with the exceptions of Corie in Barefoot in the Park and

¹³Time, 8 March 1971.

Edna in The Prisoner on Second Avenue, who at best are two-dimensional). Not so with Zindel, his women are immensely complex, as will be discussed further on.

The major similarity between Simon and Zindel is in the type of humor they both employ. It is when the major characters are enduring great discomfort and pain that the plays of Simon and Zindel are the funniest. This is certainly as true of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little as it is of Simon's The Sunshine Boys and God's Favorite. Zindel goes a step further than Simon in that his humor is also a little sick. For example, in Act One of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, Anna says:

And last week, just before I became officially debilitated, we were discussing death in the 105 Honors class, the one with all the brains--and I had them write all the ways of dying they could think of on the blackboards--fire, diphtheria, python constrictions, plane crashes, scruffy, decapitation--one kid remembered a little girl at Coney Island being run down by a miniature locomotive and getting a miniature death--and somebody else's uncle fell into a cement mixer in the Bronx and ended up as part of a bridge. By the end of the period we had the blackboards covered, crammed full of things--someone even thought of elephantiasis; we listed napalm and the bomb, and in the few seconds left to the class we all just sat back and wondered how the hell there were enough of us left to make up a class!¹⁴

Zindel also makes use of contemporary vulgarisms, such as "bullshit," for this comic effect.

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little will be produced realistically with the consideration that realistic drama

¹⁴Paul Zindel, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1971), p. 15.

usually proceeds from the idea that common experience and ordinary sensory perceptions reveal objective reality, and that objective reality is ultimate reality. In realism, the appearance of life supposedly represents what is most true about life.¹⁵ And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little is a realistic comedy about real people in a real situation. Believability is somewhat strained in the play because of the characters and their problems being so strange. The introduction of the characters of Fleur and Bob Stein is purely for comic purposes (although they do act as catalysts for what later takes place among the sisters). Bob and Fleur reveal their strange relationship and, with the exception of Fleur's final speech, their scene is generally humorous. However, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little is a generally believable real-life situation.

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little does not have a great story to tell, rather it is a play of character study, and as such, emphasis will be placed on character revelation and interaction. In this play there is a great deal of "gut-spilling"--the characters take over individually and tell their own side of things and their feelings. It is an exorcism of the mind.

This director feels that accentuation of the humor and detailed relationships among the characters will bring

¹⁵Sam Smiley, Playwriting (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 213.

about the most successful production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, a flawed play. This director feels also that over-intellectualizing of the play would undoubtedly be fatal.

Character Analysis

A very important aspect of this play is the relationships of the characters, especially the three sisters; Ceil, Anna, and Catherine. The audience needs an awareness of the hostilities and affections they hold for each other, the mutual scars left on them from their mother (recently deceased), and their very funny, but at the same time sad, personal quirks.

It would be valuable to point out the relationship between Paul Zindel's The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds and And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little. Tillie and Ruth, the sisters in The Effects of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, could easily be childhood counterparts of Ceil, Anna, and Catherine. This is seen most evidently in the characters of Tillie and Anna. Tillie is a shy, sensitive little girl interested in the wonders of science and Anna is a repressed, sensitive woman who is a science teacher. Also present in both plays is the influence of the domineering mother. Beatrice, the mother in The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, is the central character and her destructive influence on her daughters is clearly evident. "Mama" in And Miss

Reardon Drinks a Little, has just died, but her damage of her daughters is instantly apparent and her image pervades the atmosphere as the daughters remember Mama in their own way. The influence of "Mama" is a vital aspect to be considered by this director as well as the actresses portraying Ceil, Anna, and Catherine.

This director feels that And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little stresses character rather than plot and every attempt will be made to clearly define the characters.

Catherine Reardon

Catherine Reardon is the Miss Reardon who drinks a little. She is 44 years old and is the assistant principal of a local high school. Her job is revealed to have been "nepotistically endowed"--her sister, Ceil Adams, is the superintendent of schools. Catherine and the youngest of the Reardon sisters, Anna, live in an apartment that once belonged to their mother in which they grew up together. Catherine is very protective of Anna, but it seems her concern is more for her own loneliness rather than for Anna alone. She often uses large, officious words in her speech--her education and love of language are clearly evident. However, at times, she speaks in very vulgar terms. Bob Stein, the neighbor, at one point states, "Catherine, I never knew you had such a repulsive mouth."¹⁶

¹⁶Zindel, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, p. 36.

In many ways Catherine is a typical spinster type. Although throughout the play she is seen almost always as a formidable and gutsy type, it is essential that her ladylike teacher image be projected. This director's feeling is that until the few months prior to when the play takes place, Catherine was a "closet-drinker." She could cope with her job responsibly and then quietly drink through the evening. However, in the months leading up to the evening of the play Catherine's drinking has begun to get out of control. It has become evident to her colleagues as Ceil points out when she says, "They say you've started to drink a little."¹⁷

There is a great conflict between Ceil and Catherine because Ceil married Catherine's boyfriend, Edward Adams, right out from under Catherine's nose. Throughout the play this is a continual source of friction between Ceil and Catherine. At one point Anna states the situation that is so much the cause of Catherine's problems:

ANNA. Ceil, does it ever gnaw at that cybernetic soul of yours that Catherine's turned into the old maid you should have been? Take a good look at her. Catherine, how can you sit at the same table with the bitch that stole the only man that ever even liked you?

CATHERINE. Don't say anymore, Anna . . .

ANNA. When she was still living here and Edward came to see you, couldn't you smell what she was doing? Her voice daintier than usual, an extra twinkle in her eye. She'd behave herself while you were in the room but if you went out she always had a witty remark ready--some

¹⁷Ibid., p. 10.

humoresque about her pension or salary--And you got him, didn't you, Ceil, dear? Even if he was a schnook!¹⁸

Eventually it is realized that Catherine, who attains much audience sympathy, is actually a cause of many of the problems. Toward the end of Act Three Ceil says, "What is it deep down in your gut you so detest about me? That I haven't gone mad or become an obscene nasty witness? That's what you are, Catherine."¹⁹ Later on Anna adds, "You're worse than all of them. You never do anything to stop the destruction."²⁰

Ceil Reardon Adams

Ceil is the oldest of the Reardon sisters, 45 years old, and the only married one. As superintendent of schools, she is a very successful career woman and seems to be regarded with some awe by teachers and co-workers. At one point Catherine says of her, "Know what the faculty has nick-named you this year? Well, it's 'Superman.' You have finally transcended womanhood entirely."²¹

Ceil has returned to the apartment for the first time in quite a while with the intention of having Anna committed for psychiatric care. She seems to project discomfort when around her sisters, although she at times reacts with genuine feeling for them. When she realizes Anna is really mentally disturbed there is a moment of real pity. Another time while looking at a photograph of her mother in

¹⁸Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 42.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 9.

an album, she cries. However, most of the time she maintains her stern, nonsense exterior. At one point in the play Catherine relates Ceil to "Mama," "You know, Ceil--the way you said that--I mean, you're louder and crueller--but there's a part of you that's just like Mama. I think that's the part of you I've always despised."²² Eventually Ceil washes her hands of the whole situation and leaves Catherine with everything. Anna and Catherine will not, as she says, ". . . drag me down. Not at this stage of the game, my sweet sisters. Not at this stage of the game."²³ But it becomes quite evident that Ceil, willingly or not, will have to eventually handle Anna's commitment. The final impression is that Catherine, because of her own loneliness, will never see the commitment through herself.

As for Ceil's personal appearance, she is a chic careerwoman and obviously well-to-do and efficient.

Anna Reardon

Anna is the youngest of the Reardon sisters, 38 years old. At the outset of the play she has not been working for several days. At first it seems that she is sick, but it is ultimately revealed that she is mentally disturbed, seriously so. Long before she makes her appearance onstage terms such as "frightened," "flipped," "isn't feeling good," "a little sick," "she's sedated," "she hasn't been the same,"

²²Ibid., p. 42.

²³Ibid.

are used in reference to Anna. When she finally does enter the scene, her problems become clear. She behaves very erratically, tossing books about the room in search of a pistol she has in her own pocket. She has "caressed vegetarianism" since her breakdown and has an incredibly morbid fascination for death. And, at her core, she is in desperate need of love. An incident with a student is revealed by the neighbor, Fleur Stein, who states to Ceil, "You must feel absolutely dreadful your own sister being accused of doing something sexual with a young adult, but there is no disgrace to it, no disgrace."²⁴ This need for love has warped itself into a fanatical affection for animals and as Bob Stein puts it, "You've cut out a whole part of living. You might just as well have sliced off a piece of your body."²⁵ Anna's vulnerability is crucial in portraying the role as it seems essential for the audience to relate sympathetically to her despite her erratic behavior. She is a study in extremes--within a moment she may change from sweetness and tenderness into shrieking lunacy. A faded loveliness and femininity is also of major importance in creating this role.

Fleur Stein

Fleur Stein and her husband Bob are neighbors in the apartment building in which Anna and Catherine live. Fleur

²⁴Ibid., p. 31.

²⁵Ibid., p. 36.

is in her early forties and is a guidance teacher (unlicensed) in the same school Catherine and Anna work. Fleur appears in the second act supposedly to bring Anna a get-well present from her fellow teachers, but her real reason for coming is to meet Ceil and pressure Ceil for her license. It is revealed that Fleur has not been able to pass the oral part of her guidance exam. The reason for this is clearly evident--she has a thick New York-Jewish type accent, she is terribly obnoxious in manner, and is not too bright. She works hard--too hard--to impress Ceil until her husband Bob appears on the scene, easily twice as obnoxious as Fleur, and reveals that she has the interesting habit of stealing bathroom supplies from the school. Fleur's ultimate embarrassment leads to a tearful, pleading, demanding speech for her license before Catherine turns her off, by turning on the blender--loudly.

The marriage of Fleur and Bob is a strange one to say the least. At one point when Fleur leaves the room Bob says, "She's so sick it isn't funny. I mean, the Board of Ed is batty but at least they know enough not to give a bewildered schizo a license."²⁶ Also, their sex life is obviously not up to par as Bob points out, "There's something queer about teachers the way they can't turn it off even in bed."²⁷

²⁶Ibid., p. 32.

²⁷Ibid., p. 29.

The impression is also given that Fleur is extremely tasteless. Her manner of dress is gauche as is her hair style and make-up.

Bob Stein

As pointed out earlier, Bob is easily twice as obnoxious as Fleur. He uses every opportunity to run her down in front of the sisters and eventually tries to force his opinion of what should be done with Anna on the Reardons. Bob is "all business" and does not seem to have a sensitive bone in his body. His age is also in the early to middle forties and is gauche in his manner of dress as his wife is. The playwright offers very little as far as character insight is concerned in the role of Bob, his main function being to serve as a foil for Fleur.

Mrs. Pentrano

Mrs. Pentrano, an Italian lady in her late fifties, is the landlady of the apartment building in which the Reardon sisters live. She comes to try to sell cosmetics to Catherine and her purpose in the play, aside from providing some humor, is to discuss Anna's problems and set up the entrance of Ceil. Mrs. Pentrano seems to be a giddy, thoughtless little woman and a source of annoyance to the Reardons.

Delivery Boy

The Delivery Boy is about 16 or 17 years old. He is a student in the school the Reardon sisters teach at and was in one of Anna's classes, one she began to behave strangely in. The Delivery Boy is a typical smart aleck high school punk type and his purpose in the play is purely for humorous purposes and to get across how well known Anna's problem has become.

Scenic Analysis

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little takes place in a small but comfortable New York City apartment. The apartment is in an old building and the Reardons have lived there for many years. The apartment greatly shows the influence of Mama and has a definite feminine touch. The furniture is old but well kept.

This production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little will be done in a three-sided arena staging. This director feels that this play is proscenium-oriented, but staging And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little in an arena set-up was not of this director's choosing. In spite of this, the floor-plan developed for this production is a very workable one. The stage area is divided into two halves (one is slightly larger), one representing a living room area, and one representing a dining room area (the living room is the larger section). The kitchen is also visible through louvered doors in the dining room section and in the living room

section there is a two-step rise leading to an archway which leads to the front door. The aisle leading into the living room area will be assumed to be the hallway to the bedroom and bathroom.

Lighting for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little will all be realistic lighting, no special cues or effects.

Costuming will be simple, appropriate modern dress, with the exception of Fleur and Bob who will be dressed in more garish, loud type clothing.

Justification of Script

This director feels that despite flaws in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little there are a great many good reasons for doing this play. The challenge of working with a script that is not the best and an awareness of the flaws offers an exciting opportunity to the director. The roles, particularly of the four female principals, are excellently drawn characters and will offer another challenge to both the director and the actresses playing the roles.

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little has a lot to say about the fine line between sanity and insanity, man's cruelty to his fellow man, and the many foibles that make the human being so funny and also so very tragic. It is a play that has a point and therefore, this director feels that it is worth doing.

PART II

PROMPT BOOK

Act One

(HOUSE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK. DINING ROOM LIGHTS AND KITCHEN LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY. REFRIGERATOR DOOR SLAMS AND FULL STAGE LIGHTS COME UP.)

(TIME: AN OCTOBER EVENING IN THE PRESENT.)

(SCENE: THE COMFORTABLE APARTMENT OF CATHERINE AND ANNA REARDON WHICH CONSISTS OF A NEAT AND PRIM-LOOKING LIVING ROOM WITH A DESK AREA COVERED WITH TEST PAPERS AND HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS. THE LIVING ROOM ADJOINS A DINING ROOM WITH A WELL-STOCKED BAR IN ONE CORNER AND AN ENTRANCE TO A KITCHEN WHICH IS PARTIALLY VISIBLE. SEE FIGURE 1.)

(AT RISE: CATHERINE ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN WITH FRUITBOWL AND HER DRINK. SHE IS DRESSED AS ONE WOULD EXPECT A FORTYISH OLD MAID SCHOOL TEACHER TO BE DRESSED. SHE WEARS SIMPLE GLASSES AND HER HAIR PULLED BACK. SHE CROSSES TO BAR, N. E., STARTS TO MIX PITCHER OF MANHATTANS. FINDING NOTHING TO STIR THE CONCOCTION, SHE CROSSES TO DESK, E., GETS RULER AND RETURNS TO BAR. THE DOORBELL SOUNDS. CATHERINE POURS HERSELF A DRINK, TOASTS FRONT DOOR, DRINKS AND CROSSES TO FRONT DOOR, S. W.)

CATHERINE

(UNLOCKING THE FRONT DOOR AND SWINGING IT OPEN TO REVEAL MRS. PENTRANO, THE WIFE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE APARTMENT BUILDING IN WHICH CATHERINE AND ANNA LIVE.)

What do you want?

MRS. PENTRANO

(STEPPING IN.) Would you mind if I come in for a moment?

CATHERINE

I'm sorry but I'm in a state of dishabille. Also, my bitch sister's coming for dinner. (STARTS TO CLOSE DOOR.)

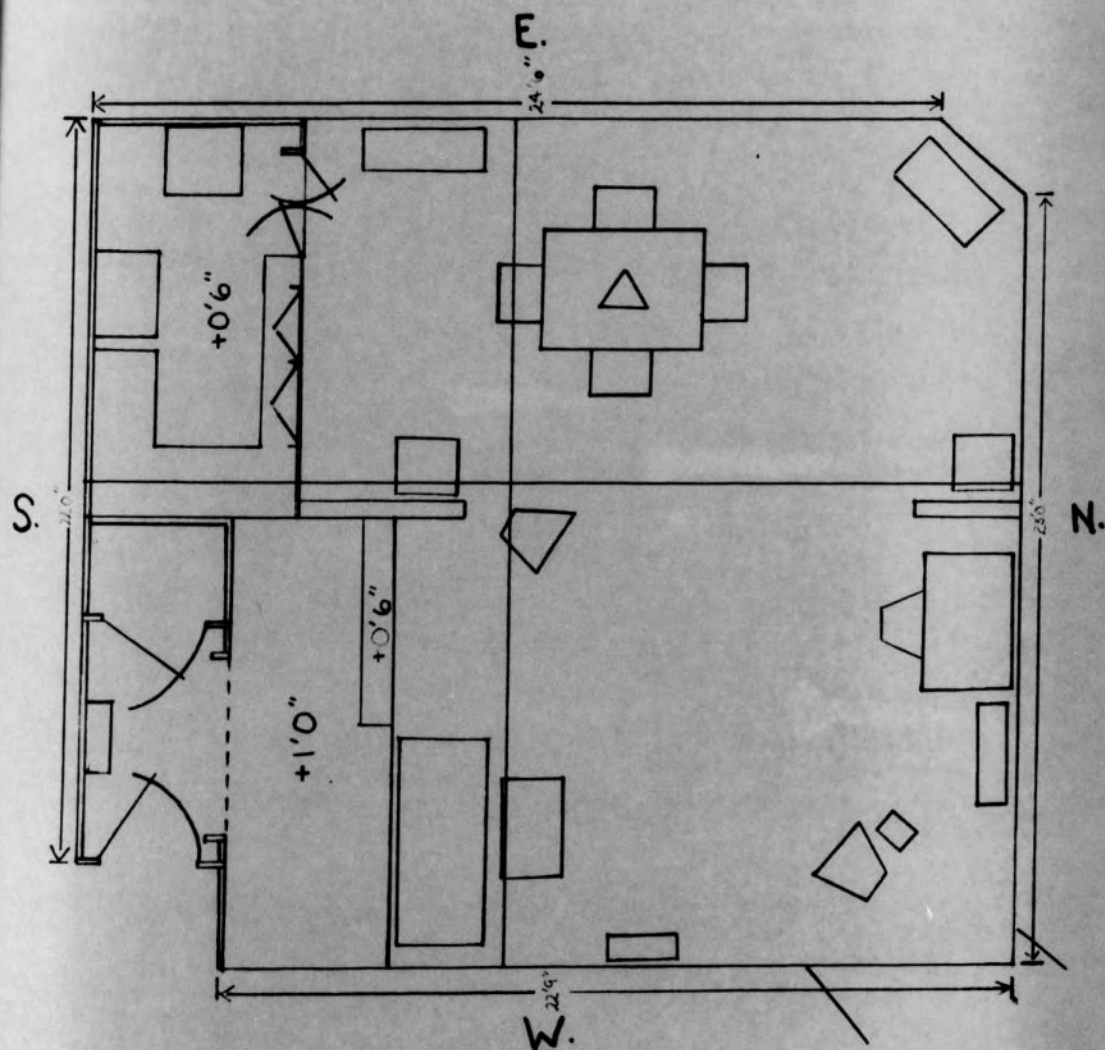


Figure 1

MRS. PENTRANO

(EDGING IN.) My husband wanted me to check on the lock to make sure you're not having any trouble with it. He was blowing out the furnace but I told him the Reardons have always been nice to us, so he should go out of his way, especially the way Anna sounded so frightened on the phone. Does she like the lock?

(SHE CLOSES THE DOOR.)

CATHERINE

She genuflected before it. Now, if you'll excuse me . . .

(CROSSES TO SIDEBOARD, N. BEGINS SETTING TABLE.)

MRS. PENTRANO

(CROSSES TO CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE, S. W.)

What I was wondering was, would you like to order some cosmetics? It's the holiday order, and most of the things you like are on sale.

CATHERINE

I don't need anything, unless you've got bottled resurrection.

MRS. PENTRANO

(LEANING ACROSS TABLE.) Oh, that's too bad because if I don't get my order in tonight, I'll lose the commission bonus. The Magnolia skin-softener is on special.

CATHERINE

(LEANING ACROSS TABLE.) Magnolia, Mrs. Pentrano. Not Magnolia. And I don't want any. I tried it once, and I got out of the bathtub feeling like I'd just swum the Hudson.

MRS. PENTRANO

(LAUGHING, CROSSES TO SOFA, S. W.) Miss Reardon, you always make me laugh. I wish I had your sense of humor. I really do.

(SHE TAKES A CATALOG AND ORDER PAD OUT OF THE BAG SHE IS CARRYING.)

CATHERINE

Would you mind keeping your cackle down? Anna is resting.

(SHE GESTURES TO BEDROOM, S. E.)

MRS. PENTRANO

(WHISPERING.) Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot she wasn't feeling good. Can I put you down for a box of lilac pellets? They're on special.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) Where did you hear Anna wasn't feeling good?

MRS. PENTRANO

(CROSSES TO CATHERINE.) Anna? Oh--You mentioned it a couple of days ago in the lobby. I hadn't seen her . . . and . . . the way she sounded so scared on the phone this morning . . .

CATHERINE

Oh . . .

MRS. PENTRANO

It's no wonder she's sick, with all those chemistry things she's teaching. And watching all those brats making test tubes of stinky gases and setting off hydrogen explosions and injecting rat embryos with dioxyneuki something-or-other.

CATHERINE

Dioxyribonucleic acid. (REPEATS SLOWLY.) Dioxyribonucleic acid. (CROSSES TO BAR.)

MRS. PENTRANO

(SNIFFS: CROSSES BACK TO SOFA, S. W.) How about a room deodorant? Kiss of Heather? Tropical Night?

CATHERINE

Tropical Night--that's the one you gave me last time, and it smelled like Morning in Bayonne.

MRS. PENTRANO

Kiss of Heather. You'll like that. Anna always takes a jar of bath crystals. (SHE NOTES THAT ON HER PAD.) Mrs. Adams hasn't been here in such a long time, has she? She was one of my best customers. Of course, your lovely mother was, too. (AS CATHERINE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN MRS. PENTRANO MOVES TO CENTER AND RAISES HER VOICE.) A lovely . . . (SHE REMEMBERS ANNA IS RESTING AND LOWERS HER VOICE.) . . . lady. Lovely. (THE DOORBELL SOUNDS.) I'll get it! (CROSSES TO FRONT DOOR, S. W.)

(SHE OPENS THE DOOR TO ADMIT A DELIVERY BOY BURDENED WITH GROCERIES.)

DELIVERY BOY

(CROSSES TO DINING ROOM.) Hello, Mrs. P. (CATHERINE ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN.) Hi, Miss Reardon. How're you doing?

CATHERINE

Shut up, please. Put the stuff in the chair.

DELIVERY BOY

(PUTTING GROCERIES DOWN.) I ain't making any noise.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.) Am not, not "ain't." Did Mr. Catobin remember to wrap the chop meat separately?

DELIVERY BOY

(TAKES STEP TOWARD CATHERINE.) Chopped. It's chopped meat, not "chop meat."

CATHERINE

(TURNS TO DELIVERY BOY.) Just answer the question.

MRS. PENTRANO

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, W.) You're probably due for body powder. (SHE JOTS DOWN AN ORDER.)

CATHERINE

(TO THE DELIVERY BOY AS SHE TAKES A PACKAGE OUT OF THE GROCERY BAG.) Is this it?

DELIVERY BOY

(CROSSES TO DESK CHAIR, E.) I guess so.

CATHERINE

(TAKING THE CHOPPED MEAT OUT OF THE BAG AND ARRANGING IT IN AN EMPTY FANNY FARMER CANDY BOX.) What do you mean you "guess so"? If you don't start being more precise, you're going to be nothing but a delivery boy all your life. Do you know how unprepossessing it can be to be a sixty-four-year-old-delivery boy?

MRS. PENTRANO

The satchets . . . (SHE PRONOUNCES IT SO THAT IT RHYMES WITH "HATCHETS".) . . . are on special, too. (CROSSES TO CENTER.)

CATHERINE

Sachets, Mrs. Pentrano. Sachets, not satchets. (CATHERINE IS FILLING CANDY BOX WITH CHOPPED MEAT.)

DELIVERY BOY

Is your sister still sick, Miss Reardon? I was in her Applied Chem class. That was one of the classes she acted a little sick in. (LAUGHS.)

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO DELIVERY BOY.) Haven't I seen you down in the Dean's Office recently?

DELIVERY BOY

When Mr. Goodman threw me out of Personality Development for sneezing. He said I spit on him. (SEE FIGURE 2.)

CATHERINE

You have the face of a boy that would do gruesome things.

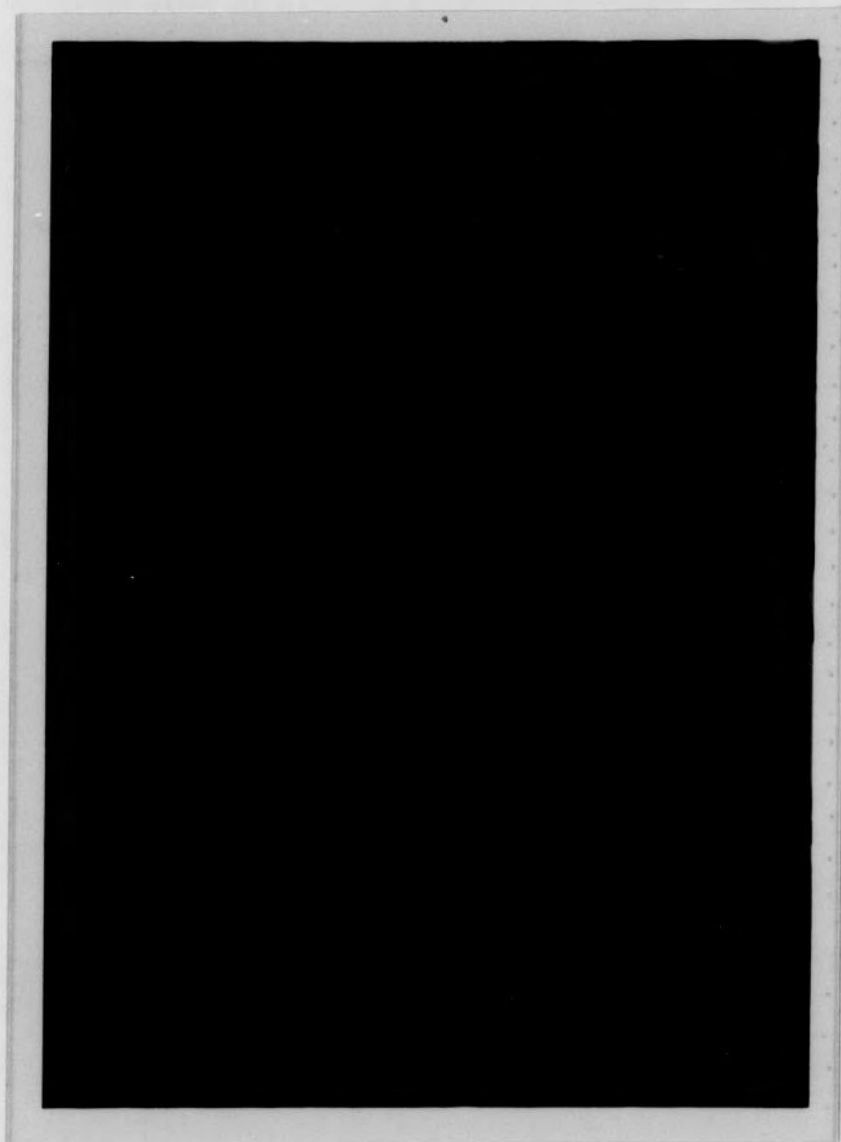


Figure 2

DELIVERY BOY

(NOSE TO NOSE WITH CATHERINE.) Tell me, do you always put chopped meat in candy boxes? Some people might think that was gruesome.

CATHERINE

(CATHERINE GRABS DELIVERY BOY AND PROPELS HIM TO FRONT DOOR.) All right, fat trap. You can get out of here.

MRS. PENTRANO

You've got a fresh mouth on you, young man.

CATHERINE

(OPENING FRONT DOOR.) I'd tip you, but it's against my profession.

DELIVERY BOY

You can say that again! (HE DARTS OUT.)

CATHERINE

(CALLS AFTER HIM.) Don't be disrespectful to someone as dignified as I, or you'll end up with a pair of knuckles in your eyeballs! Mrs. Pentrano, you've got to beat it, too.

MRS. PENTRANO

(CROSSES TO SOFA, S. W.) With kids like that in her class, it's no wonder Anna flipped.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES IN TO LIVING ROOM STEPS.) I beg your pardon? Where did you hear that Anna . . . flipped? (MOVING TOWARD MRS. PENTRANO, BACKING HER AROUND COFFEE TABLE.)

MRS. PENTRANO

Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything, I really didn't. I just heard . . . it was the kids that got her a little . . . I mean . . . (SHE MOVES TOWARD THE DOOR UNDER CATHERINE'S GLARE.) The lock . . . I hope she feels better with the new lock. With all those things happening

nowadays, I don't blame her for . . . anything that's happened to her. Those Lebonons fighting in the alley last night scared half the neighborhood. It was awful. Mrs. Greer in 4D called the police, but they were gone by the time they got there. Anna always gets an eye pencil.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES IN TO MRS. PENTRANO ON STEPS.) Lebonons? What Lebonons?

MRS. PENTRANO

Don't tell me you didn't hear those two women punching each other like a couple of prize fighters last night? They were screaming at the top of their lungs in the alley. You didn't hear that?

CATHERINE

(NOSE TO NOSE WITH MRS. PENTRANO.) Those were not Lebonons, Mrs. Pentrano. Those were Lesbians.

(CEIL ADAMS APPEARS IN THE DOORWAY. HER PRESENCE IS IMPOSING. SHE CARRIES A BRIEF CASE. MRS. PENTRANO SEES HER AND IS SOMEWHAT STARTLED AT THE SIGHT OF HER.)

MRS. PENTRANO

Hello, Mrs. Adams.

CEIL

Hello, Mrs. Pentrano.

MRS. PENTRANO

(AWKWARDLY.) Welcome home.

CEIL

Thank you, Mrs. Pentrano. (CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E.)

(BY THE TONE OF HER VOICE, CEIL DISMISSES MRS. PENTRANO, WHO THEN SLIPS BY HER AND EXITS INTO THE HALL.)

CATHERINE

(CLOSES AND BOLTS FRONT DOOR.) Well, well, well. I never thought you'd show up. Of course, that's not quite true. (SLOWLY COMES DOWN STEPS INTO LIVING ROOM.)

CEIL

I had asked to come.

CATHERINE

(CROSSING TO CEIL.) Oh, sure, but it wouldn't be the first time your busy, busy schedule would cancel out a lovely family dinner. What do they have you supervising down there at the Board of Ed? The Christmas party? It's October, so I guess they're starting to make the tree decorations.

CEIL

I had intended to call before this. (CROSSES TO DINING ROOM TABLE.)

CATHERINE

Oh yes, I'm sure. Superintended. Do you realize you haven't been here to see us since we put Mother in her grave? A couple of lousy phone calls in seven months, you little bitch.

CEIL

(CROSSES TO KITCHEN DOOR, PEERS IN. AFTER A SUITABLE PAUSE.) Where's Anna?

CATHERINE

She's "sedated." Do you want a Manhattan? (CROSSES TO CLOSET WITH CEIL'S COAT.)

CEIL

Yes, please. She hasn't been teaching since last Thursday? (CATHERINE CROSSES TO BAR, N. E., AS CEIL CROSSES TO CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE, W.)

CATHERINE

Oh, cut the crap, Ceil.

CEIL

Look, I wouldn't be here now if Hamilton didn't call and . . . (CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E., AND SITS.)

CATHERINE

Sister, that tone of voice of yours butchers me, dear.

CEIL

He suggested . . .

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CEIL, HANDS HER DRINK, THEN CROSSES TO SOFA AND SITS.) Sibling, sweets, your penultimate shortcoming has become the fact that you've taken so many graduate education courses you've ended up with euphemism of the brain. Nobody does anything at that Board without checking with you first--the overdressed Sheena of the Blackboard Jungle.

CEIL

Jesus Christ, you forget!

CATHERINE

Forget! Nobody forgets! Every teacher in that demented little school looks at me and silently burps in my face every day of the week. Where would you be if it wasn't for that powerhouse of a sister of yours? Know what the faculty has nicknamed you this year? Well, it's "superman." (SHE RISES.) You have finally transcended womanhood entirely.

CEIL

Catherine, what's the matter with Anna?

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, W. AND SITS.) Matter? Who says there's anything the matter? Just because she started crying now and then--like right in front of her classes? I don't know where you got the idea something was the matter. Well, maybe she just wanted a little change of routine, like Mrs. Miniken at Oakwood High. Remember Mrs. Miniken? (SHE RISES.) Mrs. Miniken, who leaped from the school roof

and splattered herself all over the handball courts. Now, that was a change of routine. Mrs. Miniken--splat --all because of some marital difficulties, wasn't it? And she taught Family Living.

CEIL

She hasn't been the same since Mama died, has she?

CATHERINE

Now look, Ceil. We might as well be honest about this whole thing. (SHE SITS.) The only thing you're disquieted about is how much nuisance Anna is going to cause you. How much trouble. How much mortification. How much money. I mean, let's face it. That's what's got you out of your condominium, isn't it?

CEIL

Actually, Catherine, the only unkind remarks I've heard lately have been about you.

CATHERINE

Oh, is that so? Well, I'm not interested. In fact, you may not even have to worry much longer about my nepotistically endowed assistant principalship, because I'm thinking of quitting and becoming a waitress. I could do with a little honest work for a change.

CEIL

They say you've started to drink a little. (SHE RISES.)

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.) What a preposterous and cruel disestimation. Who would hoot such a thing about me? Could it be one of your old friends from around here? One of our mutual friends before your nuptials? Was it Mr. Pollack in Apartment 2A, who beats his wife because she's having sex with the Fuller Brush man? Or was it Mrs. Pedowicz in 4C, who beats her husband because he's having sex with the Fuller Brush man?

CEIL

It doesn't matter who said it. (CROSSES TO CENTER.)

CATHERINE

What do you mean, it doesn't matter? They've got one hell of a nerve.

CEIL

Actually, it was someone from your own school.

CATHERINE

Someone from that bibliophilic looney bin? Who? Mrs. Drisser, that pygmyess with the face like Toto, the kissless bride? Or Lipschitz, who wears the same suit for six months and putts around with Gorgonzola of the breath? That whole pack of academically defunct, eternally matriculated and fuckingly overpaid nuts and what are they saying? Miss Reardon drinks a little. Jesus Christ! (SWILLS DOWN HER DRINK.)

CEIL

(PUTTING DRINK ON DESK, CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E.) Look, if you've already had too much, I'll come back in the morning.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) No! (A PAUSE. CROSSES TO SIDEBOARD, N. W. FOR CANDY BOX.) Well, maybe it was Mama's death that got her. And maybe it wasn't. I thought she got over that nicely, considering . . . Don't you, Ceil?

(SHE OPENS THE CANDY BOX AND NIBBLES AT ITS CONTENTS INTERMITTENTLY WHILE FOLDING AND SETTING TABLE NAPKINS.)

CEIL

Was she all right on the trip? (CROSSES TO DESK FOR HER DRINK THEN MOVES TO CENTER.)

CATHERINE

Oh, she did fine, just fine, till we got to Rome, that is; then she picked up this flea-bitten, ugly cat. There she was, running around the whole city picking up cats: black ones, green ones, yellow ones, three-legged ones, one-eyed ones--picking up any mangy sad thing she could get her hands on, while I was trying to get picked up by some of

those two-legged smooth Italian tomcats--(CEIL FINISHES DRINK AND CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.) oh, I'm sorry, Ceil. I must sound crude to a happily married woman like yourself. Happily nuptial to a big handsome man like Edward. How's Edward? Does he ask about me? (A PAUSE. CATHERINE CROSSES TO CEIL.) Oh, we mustn't go into that--must not we? (CEIL SITS IN CHAIR ON SOUTH SIDE OF DINING ROOM TABLE; CATHERINE CROSSES TO N. W. CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) Any way, the night before we were going to leave for Naples for the tourist barge back, I finally found the Trevi Fountain and I was tossing my eighty-third coin, when Anna found this huge white cat, a tortured-looking thing, with a face like Goya's "St. Sebastian"--(EXITING TO KITCHEN WITH GROCERIES.)

CEIL

El Greco's . . .

CATHERINE

(IN KITCHEN DOORWAY.) Somebody's St. Sebastian--and she picked it up, saying right into that hairy, festooned face, (OPENS LOUVRED DOORS FROM KITCHEN.) "Nice little pussy, pussykin. Nice little pussy, pussy." (REENTERS FROM KITCHEN TO N. W. CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) And the dear little thing responded by burying its front fangs into Anna's wrist. Right down to the bone.

(SHE TAKES A HUGE MOUTHFUL OF CHOPPED MEAT.)

CEIL

(RISES.) What the hell are you eating? Chop meat? Raw chop meat? (SHE SITS BACK DOWN.)

CATHERINE

It's chopped meat, not chop meat. Fanny Farmer Chopped Meat. (TAKES CANDY BOX TO DESK, E.)

CEIL

Are you crazy? What on earth for?

CATHERINE

(SITS IN DESK CHAIR, E.) Hold your water--you're rushing the story. So anyway, we laughed the cat bite off and go to Naples for this Christoforo trawler to get back here in time for school, which was to begin on September something or other.

CEIL

School started September sixteenth.

CATHERINE

(RISES, CROSSES TO CEIL.) Yes, Ceil, you're utterly correct. Utterly precise as usual. September sixteenth. And the afternoon before we docked, around September third--try to pardon me for this temporal equivocation--docked in New York, Anna took an afternoon nap and had a nightmare--an afternoon-mare, if you will--and that evening she fainted in the dining room. (CROSSES TO CENTER OF LIVING ROOM.) To tell the truth, I was ready to pass out myself from the table-mates we got stuck with. I knew I should have tipped the maitre d' on the gangplank--this whole table of stag matrons who were so desperate they were sprinting after the busboys like piranha in evening gowns.

CEIL

Why did Anna faint?

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO BAR, POURS DRINK.) Well, Anna came to the conclusion she had rabies. But the ship's doctor told her not to worry, because if her symptoms were those of rabies she'd be dead in three days--which was sort of a fun prognosis. But three days later we were back here, and she was still having nightmares about some pregnant guppy or something, and we ran from doctor to doctor, each of whom told her not to take the antirabies injections because they were dangerous, and anyway the odds were one in a million that she had it. But she insisted on the shots, so for fourteen days we went to this senile quack down at the Board of Health and he stuck fourteen needles in her stomach, right here--pow, pow, pow!

(TURNS TO CEIL.)

CEIL

My God, how painful.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, EAST END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) On the contrary, Anna delighted in them. She looked like Some-boyd's St. Sebastian smiling.

CEIL

Then she was all right?

CATHERINE

No, she got worse. So I took her to a private senile quack and he put her on tranquilizers so she could get back to school, back to the beloved classroom, and he said everything she was bellyaching about was in her head. Anyway, I thought Anna was all right then or I wouldn't have let her go back to work. So she began once more to face the cheerful loving children. But they began to stalk her.

CEIL

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, W.) What do you mean stalk her?

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CEIL, THEN TO CHAIR, S. E.) In class. First they did the spitball routine--wang! Then the airplanes--zooooom! And the cow sounds--moooooo! moooooo! And the big thing last week, they were pinning flowers to her skirt without her knowing it and Scotch-taping little notes on her back like ONE OF MY TITS IS RUBBER and PLEASE MOUNT ME. Do you have any idea how embarrassing it can be to be the assistant principal of a high school and have your own sister arrive at the faculty conferences wearing a ONE OF MY TITS IS RUBBER sign on her back? It got so I had to check her clothes every period.

CEIL

Why do you think they began to do . . . dirty things to her?

CATHERINE

Well, Jesus Christ, you've got us teaching condoms in kindergarten; positions in the third grade; abortion in the sixth; pervers, nymphos, satyrs and succubi in the eighth--if you ask me it's a wonder our kids aren't balling in the aisles.

CEIL

Did Anna do anything to encourage the things they did?

CATHERINE

I think she wore lipstick.

CEIL

(RISES.) Catherine--the boy . . .

CATHERINE

(RISES.) Oh, the boy! I was wondering how long it was going to take you to get to that. The cherub.

CEIL

(ONE STEP TO CATHERINE.) She sent for him.

CATHERINE

The succulent seraphim who was present when Anna broke down--the McCloud boy . . .

CEIL

He's saying--

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CEIL.) You want to know about that little shit, I'll tell you. The nicest biographical detail on his grammar school record was that in the third grade he was caught pissing in a doll. (CROSSES TO BACK OF CHAIR, S. E.) During his first year in junior high he's taken dope, sold porno, and drew pictures of rhinoceri fornicating on the cover of his world geography textbook. Granted, he quieted down this term. He only punched a truant officer in the gut and just winks a lot as he walks around with his fly open. (CROSSES TO DESK, E.) One of the semiliterate teachers in the English department dubbed him the Inter-medable Tumescence. (SHE TAKES A BIG MOUTHFUL OF MEAT.)

CEIL

Would you stop eating that?

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO SOFA.) No. If I don't get some protein in me before Anna unsedates herself, I'm going to collapse.

CEIL

What the hell does Anna have to do with your eating that disgusting raw meat?

CATHERINE

Well, it's like this--ever since she broke down we're not allowed to eat flesh. You see, she's caressed vegetarianism. She made me throw out every piece of meat we had in the house. Even the bouillon cubes.

CEIL

(CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.) You're joking.

CATHERINE

(SITS.) Yeah, I'm joking, but you'd better like zucchini, because that's what you're getting for supper. Saturday we had sauteed zucchini, Sunday we had boiled zucchini, Monday night for variety we called it squash. I can't even cook a codfish cake--"You've got no right to kill anything," she says. Monday night she rescued a cockroach out of the toilet bowl. It isn't bad enough we're paying over two hundred bucks a month for a co-op with cockroaches, I have to have a sister who acts as a lifeguard for them.

CEIL

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) She's afraid of death . . . Maybe the way Mama died . . .

CATHERINE

(RISES, CROSSES TO CEIL AT CENTER.) Oh, for Christ's sake, she's always been like that and you know it. Remember when Mama took us to St. Mary's Bazaar and we put her on that little Ferris wheel? There was only enough money for one, and Mama said she could go alone . . . remember?

CEIL

Yes.

CATHERINE

Jesus, I'll never forget her face when that motor started and she went up and up and up . . .

(ANNA SUDDENLY APPEARS IN THE HALLWAY FROM THE BED-ROOM. SHE IS WEARING A BATHROBE, AND HER HAIR FALLS LOOSE ABOUT HER SHOULDERS. SHE STOPS BEHIND CHAIR, S. E.)

ANNA

And I told them to stop--stop the machine.

CEIL

(ONE STEP TO ANNA.) Anna . . .

ANNA

Oh, Ceil, I didn't know you were coming.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO ANNA.) I told you nineteen times she was coming. (SITS IN CHAIR, S. E.)

ANNA

I forgot. I must have forgotten. I'm so doped up on tranquilizers and all those capsules. (A PAUSE. CROSSES TO CEIL.) I'm sorry, Ceil . . . I'm so ashamed, so ashamed. (CROSSES TO SOFA, SITS, IN TEARS.)

CATHERINE

If you'll excuse me, I'll get dinner ready. I'm unsure just how to peel a marinated zucchini. (EXITS TO KITCHEN.)

CEIL

(CROSSES TO SOFA, N. END.) Anna, stop crying. I want to talk to you.

ANNA

What did you come here for? She didn't even tell me you were coming?

CEIL

I was concerned about . . .

ANNA

(RISES.) Oh, my God--what a disgrace I've been to you, breaking down the way I did. I just couldn't give it back any more to all those snots. (CROSSES TO DESK, E. AND SITS IN DESKCHAIR.)

CEIL

(CROSSES TO SOFA, S. END.) Anna--get a hold of yourself.

ANNA

(CALLING TOWARD THE KITCHEN.) Catherine! Did you ask her about the gun? Catherine, get back in here!

CEIL

What gun?

CATHERINE

(ENTERING FROM THE KITCHEN, CROSSES TO CENTER.) I'll ask her now, and then you write it down so that tomorrow and all next week you don't keep asking me if I asked her. Ceil, when Mother died and you ramshackled this place for every piece of worthwhile silver, linen and glassware you could lay your hands on, did you also suck up Mother's pistol? Because if you did suck up Mother's pistol I wish you'd give it back so I can melt it down in front of Anna so she stops driving me crazy! (SHE EXITS INTO THE KITCHEN.)

CEIL

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) That old gun Mama used to keep in the phonograph?

ANNA

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E., AND SITS.) Yes. The one that would have frightened burglars and mashers away if we had ever gotten any.

CEIL

(CROSSES TO KITCHEN DOOR.) Catherine! I resent the way you said that. I didn't ramshackle or suck up anything. I took a few of Mother's things just to save them. I just wanted to save them!

CATHERINE

(PEEKING HER HEAD IN THROUGH THE KITCHEN WINDOW.)
Bullshit!

(SHE POPS OUT OF SIGHT AGAIN.)

ANNA

(RISES.) Well, did you take the gun or didn't you, because I don't want it in this house!

CEIL

(YELLING TO CATHERINE.) You still have that same filthy mouth! (CROSSES TO CENTER.)

ANNA

(CROSSES TO CEIL.) Why can't you admit whether you have it or not?

CEIL

I don't have it!

ANNA

(RUNS TO DESK, E., AND BEGINS GOING THROUGH DRAWERS.) Then it's here. I knew it was still here, and I'm afraid to have it in this house.

CEIL

Anna, the gun only had blanks in it.

ANNA

(AT BOOKCASE, E.) Blanks? That's all it had in it, but couldn't someone have gone right down the street to Morrison's Sport Shop and bought some real bullets for it? It could kill someone right this minute, so I don't want it around--can't you get that through your skull? (CROSSES TO BOOKCASE, S.)

CEIL

But nobody did buy real bullets for it.

ANNA

(LOOKING BEHIND BOOKS IN BOOKCASES.) You tell me you know for sure someone didn't buy size 22 bullets for that gun-- (CROSSES TO CEIL.) it could take size 22 real bullets, you know--you tell me you know for sure that right this minute that gun isn't in this house loaded and ready to kill and I'll call you a goddam liar! (CROSSES BACK TO BOOKCASE, S., AND THROWS A COUPLE OF BOOKS ON THE FLOOR TOWARD CEIL.)

CEIL

What the hell are you afraid of? (SITS IN CHAIR, S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.)

ANNA

What am I afraid of?

CATHERINE

(ENTERING WITH A DISH OF PINEAPPLES.) We were going to have carrot and beet juice for the appetizer because they're supposed to be good for acne, boils and carbuncles--but I assume none of us have acne, boils, and carbuncles, so I thought crushed pineapple would be better.

(SHE GOES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.)

ANNA

(CONTINUING, TO CEIL.) I'm afraid of someone putting a bullet into my brain, that's what I'm afraid of.

(SHE THROWS ANOTHER BOOK.)

CEIL

Stop throwing those books, please.

ANNA

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) And last week, just before I became officially debilitated, we were discusssing death in the 105 honors class--the one with all the brains--and I had them write all the ways of dying they could think of on the blackboards: fire, diphtheria, python constrictions, plane crashes, scurvy, decapitation--one kid remembered a little girl at Coney Island being run down by a miniature locomotive and getting a miniature death, and somebody else's uncle fell into a cement mixer in the Bronx and

ended up as part of a bridge. By the end of the period we had the blackboards covered, crammed full of things-- someone even thought of elephantiasis; we listed napalm and the bomb, and in the few seconds left to the class we all just sat back and wondered how the hell there were enough of us left alive to make up a class!

(CROSSES TO BOOKCASE, E., THROWS ANOTHER BOOK DOWN, THEN RETRIEVES IT.)

CEIL

Stop it, Anna! (A PAUSE.) Why did you save that one?

ANNA

It's Mother's Bible. She used to read it by proxy, remember? She'd have me read it when she was--atrophying--(CROSSES TO SOFA, S. W., SITS, HER VOICE BREAKS.)

CEIL

(RISES, COLLECTS BOOKS FROM FLOOR, CROSSES TO ANNA.) Anna, I came here tonight--I want you to know it's taken me a while to get used to Mama's being gone, too. (CROSSES TO BOOKCASE, S.)

ANNA

That's very comforting of you, Ceil. Very comforting. But you've got a husband, and that helped you in your grief, I'm sure. I'll bet he's a pain in the ass, though. (CEIL CROSSES TO BOOKCASE, E.) You must have loved him very much, Ceil--Havre de Grace, Maryland, wasn't it? Havre de Grace! Catherine and I would have loved to have come down for the wedding, but I guess it was simply too precipitous. I know what it must have been like being swept away by Edward's impetuosity.

(THERE IS A PAUSE.)

CEIL

(TURNS TO ANNA.) Look, Anna . . .

ANNA

(RISES, CROSSES TO CEIL.) Ceil, dear, you didn't get stuck with Mama like I did--watching her dehydrate, bounce up and down while her throat was closing. Did Edward

remind you of our father? You know, I can't even remember what Papa looked like. I mean, I know his face from pictures in the albums--did you suck those up, too?

CEIL

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) I didn't suck up anything!

ANNA

(OPENING AN ALBUM FROM BOOKCASE, E.) Oh, here it is. I mean, I was only three years old when he ran off to live with that skinny ostrich lady in Greenwich Village--123 Minetta Lane--but you and Catherine were nine, ten, remember? I couldn't go on the bus to see him at Christmas, but you two could . . .

CEIL

(LOOKING AT A PAGE IN THE ALBUM.) I remember . . . (SITS IN DESK CHAIR, E.)

ANNA

(CENTER OF LIVING ROOM.) Christmas. That was the only time you got to see him. All Mama would let me do was go along down to the bus stop, and then you and Catherine would go and get all the gifts and money you could grab; and Mama told you to smile at him, smile at your father, smile big, because then he'd give you more money and bigger dolls--and then she'd whisper sweetly, "Remember, girls, don't miss the bus back, and don't go with him if he tries to take you anywhere, and don't let him touch you between your legs, and then after you've finished smiling and after you've grubbed everything you can get, get right back on the bus and all the way home remember what a bastard your father is because he ran away with a skinny ostrich woman from Greenwich Village!"

CEIL

(CRYING, FROM A MEMORY.) Oh, Mama . . .

ANNA

(CHECKING TO SEE WHAT PICTURE CEIL IS LOOKING AT.) Oh, I think her nose is too big in that one. (SHE TAKES THE ALBUM AND TURNS TO THE LAST PAGE.) I like this one. I took it three days before she died, with a 3.5 lens opening and Tri-X film. I never thought it would come out, there was

so little light in the bedroom. She wanted me to tell her about the Visions of the Apocalypse that day, and I figured by taking her picture I could make her forget, because I was ruining my eyes from the little Biblical print. You need teensie eyes for that sort of thing. You know, if I hadn't bought The Holy Bible in Brief--that pocket edition put out by Mentor Books--Mentor! I swear to God words are weird!--if I hadn't bought it I would have gone blind. So I told her about this one vision with the horses--white, red, black and pale horses coming out of the seals--CEIL!--the first four seals, Ceil, and I got tired of reading so I told her the end of Pinocchio. (SITS IN CHAIR, W.) She liked that better than the horses. I don't even know what a pale horse is.

CEIL

(VIEWING THE PATHETIC STATE OF HER SISTER.) Oh, my God . . .

ANNA

I'd cry to . . . but I don't think about it. I just can't make sense out of anything any more. I feel like I'm being wrapped in cellophane, my mind . . . as though it's being coated with something and I can't help myself.

(CATHERINE ENTERS WITH A BOWL OF SUNFLOWER SEEDS.)

CATHERINE

Anna says these sunflower seeds are marvelous for vitamin C and roughage--but they knock hell out of your molars. (CROSSES TO ANNA.) Did you tell sweetsie Ceil all about Rome and the cute little puddy-cat?

ANNA

(PUTTING THE ALBUM DOWN.) Do you think Mama was afraid of the world?

CATHERINE

One could suspect that a woman who kept a pistol in her phonograph and who locked the door even when her children went to put the garbage out was somewhat apprehensive.

(SHE GOES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.)

CEIL

Anna, what was the nightmare you had on the ship?

ANNA

Oh, that thing. It started with an aquarium filled with water--dripping with water--and I was standing outside, watching a guppy give birth to a whole batch of babies; and then the mother started devouring the little fish right as soon as they came out--but somehow she was the one who ended up disemboweled. (CEIL REACTS AND TURNS FROM ANNA.)

CATHERINE

(ENTERING TO N. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) Here's the zucchini, girls. Come and get it!

CEIL

What a terrible nightmare.

CATHERINE

If you wanted something else you should've brought it.

CEIL

(RISES, CROSSES TO CENTER.) I was talking to Anna.

CATHERINE

Did she tell you the part in the dream where she's running perpendicular along a beach?

ANNA

(AS SHE SITS DOWN AT THE TABLE IN CHAIR, W. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) There was water all around me and I hated the water. I was afraid of the water. In the dream . . .

CATHERINE

That's right, Anna, you in the middle--and we'll put our lovely sister near the squash pot.

CEIL

I'm not very hungry.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CEIL, THEN TO DESK FOR CANDY BOX.) You're not hungry now, eh? Wait'll you get a mouthful of that crap.

CEIL

(SITTING IN CHAIR, S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SIT.) Why do you think you fainted in the dining room, Anna?

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO N. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SITS.) First she's gotta tell you the little game the piranha in evening gowns were playing at the table when the hirsute busboys were in the kitchen. It was called: "Who Am I? Who Am I?" God, these sunflower seeds are tasty. Anna had told them about her encounter with the pernicious pussy cat at the Trevi Fountain, so this one desperate ruminating piranha, who wore dresses so low she looked like she was incessantly passing flesh-colored Idaho potatoes--this desperate forty-eight-inch-boobed piranha did a little pantomime which went like this (WITH WEIRD VOICE.): "Who Am I? Who Am I?" (SHE RISES, CROSSES TO BAR, N. E., AND MIMES PICKING UP A CAT, SNUGGLING IT IN HER ARMS, AND THEN GETTING VICIOUSLY BITTEN ON THE WRIST.)

ANNA

(RISES, CROSSES TO KITCHEN WINDOW.) Don't say any more, Catherine--please.

CATHERINE

(SITS BACK IN CHAIR, N. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) And so, Anna, with that babbling brook mouth of hers, insists on telling about her little dream--telling that whole table of bejeweled unrequited nymphs about all that water . . .

ANNA

(ONE STEP TO CATHERINE.) Please, Catherine . . .

CATHERINE

And the pregnant guppy. Water, water everywhere, and how afraid she'd been of the water, so terrified of the water in her dream. And I'm sitting there trying to digest a poached perch while she's raving on about disemboweled guppies and that goddam water--a chemistry teacher afraid

of H₂O--just absolutely terrified of water, when the piranha with the titanicly tuberous boobs says one word--one word--and Anna passed out right at the table.

CEIL

What did she say?

CATHERINE

Hydrophobia!

ANNA

(CROSSES TO CEIL.) I fainted because I knew I had rabies. Hydrophobia--the fear of water--that's the first symptom of rabies in a human being. Animals don't get that symptom, but I had that warning in my dream . . .

CEIL

Anna, if you had had any symptoms of rabies you would have been dead in three days.

ANNA

(SITS IN CHAIR, W. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE, BUT HER VOICE GETTING ANGRY.) I'm quite certain I had rabies.

CEIL

Anna, the doctors . . .

ANNA

(SCREAMING.) TO HELL WITH THE DOCTORS! (Quieter.) They don't know anything about rabies, and one day they're going to find out that the first stage of rabies is not the one they think it is--that vision before you die. They're going to find out the first symptoms of rabies are dreams, dreams of doom before it's too late to get the shots, those horrible, horrible shots in the stomach!

CEIL

(TAKING A MOUTHFUL OF FOOD--FIGHTING AGAINST GETTING FURIOUS AT ANNA'S TONE OF VOICE.) Catherine told me you loved them.

ANNA

Yeah, but they were supposed to be horrible. I loved them because I needed them.

CATHERINE

What vision before you die?

ANNA

Those quacks think the first symptom of rabies is this vision--this vision when you're wide awake. The Vision of Doom, they call it. Three days before you die. Some day they're going to find out that the first symptom is a dream of doom, not a vision of doom. A dream when there's still time to do something about it.

CEIL

You didn't have rabies, Anna.

ANNA

I had rabies, YOU GODDAM STUPID FOOL! (CEIL MOVES QUICKLY AWAY FROM THE TABLE INTO LIVING ROOM.)

CATHERINE

(COUGHING GENTLY.) I think there's a jot too much pepper in the zucchini.

CEIL

Anna, we've worked very hard to get where we are. I fought for everything I've got . . . we've got. You're hurting all of us, Anna. (CROSSES TO ANNA. PAUSES.) I understand what you're going through. (PAUSES.) You had to take care of Mama . . . You had to clean her, hear her pain.

ANNA

(RISES.) What are you doing here now, Ceil? What are you doing in this friggin' room?

CEIL

The boy, Anna . . . the boy . . . you need love . . .

ANNA

(CROSSES TOWARD KITCHEN WINDOW, W.) Yes, but Catherine doesn't have any more studs to steal. Ceil, does it ever gnaw at that cybernetic soul of yours that Catherine's turned into the old maid you should have been? (CROSSES

TO CATHERINE.) Take a good look at her. Catherine, how can you sit at the same table with the bitch that stole the only man that ever even liked you?

CATHERINE

Don't say any more, Anna . . .

ANNA

When she was still living here and Edward came to see you, couldn't you smell what she was doing? Her voice daintier than usual, an extra twinkle in her eye. She'd behave herself while you were in the room, but if you went out she always had a witty remark ready--some humoresque about her pension or salary, how she really needed help in managing her great big salary. (SHE PAUSES.) And you got him, didn't you, Ceil, dear? (SHE STAND UP.) Even if he was a schnook. He only married you because you had more loot . . . (SWEETLY.) . . . and you deserve each other, that lying titmouse and his superman. (SHE PAUSES. CROSSES TO CEIL.) I need love? Tell us, Ceil, in this marriage--this regeneration of yourself in marriage--in that great distance you've traveled from Mama's table, why is it I'm looking into your eyes and still see a cripple?

CEIL

(SITTING IN CHAIR, S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) Anna, we're going to have to do something with you.

ANNA

(CROSSES UP TO KITCHEN WINDOW.) No, Ceil--we're going to have to do something with you!

(SHE PULLS A PISTOL FROM HER BATHROBE POCKET AND FIRES IT THREE TIMES, CEIL PRACTICALLY COLLAPSES.)

CATHERINE

(SHE SIPS HER DRINK, THEN SAYS QUITE CALMLY.) Well, that was very nice, Anna. (CATHERINE CROSSES TO ANNA AS CEIL CROSSES TO DESK CHAIR, E. AND SITS IN TEARS.) We'll just put the gun in the album, see? Right in the album, and then Ceil can just take the album and the gun with her when she goes. She'll take the gun, and then you won't have to be so timorous about it's being in the house. Ceil can just save them.

ANNA

(SWEETLY AS SHE CROSSES TO CEIL.) Someone could have put real bullets in it. (CROSSES TO CATHERINE AT CENTER.)

CATHERINE

That noise might have been just what we needed. Nowadays you need nice noises every so often--like Lebonons Indian-wrestling under your window.

(BLACKOUT.)

(HOUSE LIGHTS UP.)

Act Two

(HOUSE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK. LIGHTS COME UP IN THE ENTIRE APARTMENT AS AT END OF ACT ONE.)

(TIME: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING.)

(AT RISE: CATHERINE AND ANNA ARE BESIDE EACH OTHER AT CENTER, WATCHING CEIL SOBBING IN DESK CHAIR, E.)

CATHERINE

I think tonight we'll prepare the dessert at the table. It's got to be seen to be believed.

(SHE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN.)

ANNA

(CALLING TO CATHERINE.) Don't forget the kiwi fruit! (CROSSES TO CHAIR, W. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) I really don't know who you think you are, coming in here believing you're going to do and say whatever you want, like a Queen Rhesus Monkey. Catherine and I pay the rent on this apartment now, so you're only a visitor, Ceil. A guest in the house, no longer the Queen Rhesus Monkey.

(SHE USES A PEPPER GRINDER ON HER FOOD.)

CEIL

(RISES, CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) The boy's family is going to . . .

ANNA

(RISES.) I DON'T WANT TO HEAR YOUR CRAP! (SITS.)

CATHERINE

(ENTERING WITH A LARGE ELECTRIC BLENDER, WHICH SHE SETS ON SIDEBOARD AND PLUGS IN.) Dessert is going to be a culinary treat your taste buds will never forget.

ANNA

You have the kiwi fruit?

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO ANNA.) Yes, we have the kiwi fruit. Kiwis and kumquats. Kiwis and kumquats.

(SHE EXITS TO KITCHEN.)

ANNA

(CEIL CROSSES TO FRONT OF SOFA, S. W., ANNA FOLLOWS.) Ceil, your trouble is that you eat meat. That's why you have this hallucinatory problem--this conviction that you're a Queen Rhesus Monkey. Can't you feel what meat does to you--that slightly sickening feeling in your stomach after you've stuffed yourself with centrosomes? The kind of thoughts you have, the nightmares, warning you--aren't you aware of those things? Ceil, if you wanted roast pork could you just grab an ax and lop off a pig's head? Don't you see any connection between being able to slaughter an animal and killing a human being? You barbarian. (CEIL CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE AND SITS.)

CATHERINE

(ENTERING WITH HALF A MELON ON A PLATTER. SHE SETS IT DOWN AND PROCEEDS TO SCOOP OUT LITTLE BALLS, WHICH SHE PLACES IN THE BLENDER.) When prepared and served artfully and with imagination, a vegetarian diet can be a gastro-nomic delight.

ANNA

(CROSSES TO BEHIND CEIL AND HUGS HER.) I didn't mean to scare you, Ceil. I love you, honest.

CEIL

If there was a real bullet in that gun you would've used it just the same. (CATHERINE NODS IN AGREEMENT.)

ANNA

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, W. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) But no one did go out and buy real bullets. What are you so afraid of?

CEIL

You would've killed me.

ANNA

(MOVES TO CEIL, CROUCHES BESIDE HER.) But I love you, Ceil. My own little sister. Don't you remember all the love between us, you and Catherine and me and Mama? All four of us! All that love. Oh, come on, Ceil, smile. Please smile. (SHE GOES TO TICKLE CEIL UNDER THE CHIN.) Kitchy-kitchykool!

(THE DOOR BEEL SOUNDS.)

CEIL

Don't answer it.

ANNA

You shut the hell up. (SITS IN CHAIR, W. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.)

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO FRONT DOOR, S. W.) Yes, it might be one of your old friends.

CEIL

Get rid of whoever that is.

(CEIL, VERY MUCH UPSET, GOES OFF DOWN THE HALLWAY, S. E. CATHERINE OPENS THE DOOR.)

CATHERINE

Oh, Fleur.

(FLEUR ENTERS WEARING A FUR STOLE, WITH A PANTS SUIT AND AN EXCESS OF COSTUME JEWELRY.)

FLEUR

Catherine, I tried to call you but the circuits were busy. We've missed you down at school. Really, we have. (CROSSES IN TO CENTER OF LIVING ROOM AS CATHERINE CLOSSES FRONT DOOR.) I mean, what good is a color-coordinated phone if you can't use the thing? (SEES ANNA.) Anna, darling . . . (SHE PROMENADES ACROSS TO ANNA.) You poor thing. We've missed you dreadfully. How are you feeling?

(SHE GOES TO HUG HER.)

ANNA

(JERKING AWAY FROM THE ONCOMING FUR.) Get that away from me. Get it away.

FLEUR

(UNABLE TO COMPREHEND.) I'm sorry. I . . .

CATHERINE

(STEPPING IN ONE STEP FROM FRONT DOOR.) She doesn't like fur, Fleur. (LAUGHS.)

FLEUR

I'm terribly sorry. I didn't know that. I'll just take it off, then.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO FLEUR FOR STOLE.) Let me hang it up for you. You certainly pulled out all the stops tonight, didn't you? (GOES TO CLOSET, W. WITH STOLE.)

FLEUR

(MAKES SHOWY TURN AS SHE MOVES, E. TOWARD BOOKCASE.) Oh, thank you. Bob and I are going to the theater, but I did allow some time to visit with you folks. (HAVING HUNG UP STOLE, CATHERINE CROSSES BACK TO DINING ROOM AND SITS IN CHAIR, N. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE, FLEUR CROSSES TO BEHIND CHAIR, S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) I suppose you might say I'm on official business as the representative of the teachers' Social Committee, but Mrs. Pentrano stopped at the apartment and told me Mrs. Adams was here--I

did want to meet her. Bob's gone down to the car to get a little gift for Anna that the committee allotted the money for. I bought it this afternoon when Bob and I were out shopping, but we left it in the car. (FURLESS.) Now can I give my little Anna a hug?

(SHE PROMENADES BACK TO ANNA AND GIVES HER A SHORT EMBRACE.)

ANNA

What did you get me?

FLEUR

Gifts are supposed to be surprises, Anna. It's not very much, but it's a way to know that the faculty thinks of you when your're . . . ill. I was very limited in the amount of money the committee made available . . .

CATHERINE

(RISES, CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.) Can I make you a drink?

FLEUR

I'm sorry but I don't drink. I gave up smoking in June. (CATHERINE APPLAUDS.) My, what are you eating?

ANNA

Zucchini.

FLEUR

(CROSSES, W. GETS EXTRA DINING ROOM CHAIR, PLACES IT AT S. W. CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SITS, AND BEGINS TO EAT FROM ANNA'S PLATE.) I will try a little of this, if you don't mind.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, N. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SITS.) If you didn't eat, let me fix you a plate.

FLEUR

This is just fine. I just want to nibble. (SHE CONTINUES TO EAT ZUCCHINI.) As I was saying, I was very limited in the amount of money the Social Committee made available. As you know, it's twenty-five cents a day if you're out

on at least four consecutive days--(FLEUR RISES, CROSSES TO CATHERINE.) Catherine, you weren't out four consecutive days, so nothing accumulated to get you a gift, though you are getting a card in the mail. (PATS CATHERINE ON THE BACK, THEN MOVES TO ANNA.) But Anna was out four days in a row, which gave me only one dollar to work with ordinarily, but the committee is allowed to grant up to ten dollars if it looks like the teacher's going to be really sick, so you got the full ten dollars. (PATS ANNA ON BACK.)

CATHERINE

It's nice that it's so exact.

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) I know it's ridiculously complicated but it's the only way to be fair. (TURNS TO CATHERINE.) Is Mrs. Adams here?

CATHERINE

(RISES, CROSSES TO SIDEBOARD, N.) She's in the john. I know she'd be happy if you could stay a while and meet her. She'd feel badly if you just dashed off.

FLEUR

(CROSSING BACK TO CHAIR, S. W. CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) What are you making?

CATHERINE

Dessert.

FLEUR

This zucchini is excellent. You must tell me how to prepare it some time. I've never even thought of preparing zucchini.

CATHERINE

I have a few more ingredients to get and then I'll tell sis you're here. She'll be very excited. (SHE EXITS TO KITCHEN.)

FLEUR

Anna, Anna, Anna. (SHE RISES, CROSSES TO CENTER OF LIVING ROOM, TURNS BACK TO ANNA.) Now, I want you to know, Anna,

that we're all with you. We all want you go get better and rest and come back to us soon. We all talk about how much we miss you at the lunch table. You always had a funny story, and so much spirit; we just don't know what to talk about any more. (SHE WATCHES ANNA CHEWING.) You just go right on eating. (CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. W. CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SITS.) I thought you'd be finished with supper by now. The zucchini is really excellent. (SHE PUTS A LITTLE MORE ON HER OWN PLATE.) Bob and I got in such a fight over whether we should have bought you a religious article or not. I told him in times like these you'd appreciate something of faith and he said I was crazy. He doesn't think anyone believes in religion any more. Of course, I see the fallout of religious conviction in the children during my guidance sessions with them. It isn't that they don't believe in religion; children don't even think about it any more. I thought you'd like a nice gold cross with a chain, but Bob said even if you were religious you'd have plenty of them, and I told him I never saw you wear one at school.

ANNA

(RISES, CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E., SITS.) I don't wear crosses.

FLEUR

That's just what I told Bob. (CROSSES TO CENTER OF LIVING ROOM.) Since I didn't see you wearing any crosses I was fairly sure that you wouldn't appreciate a faith gift, which is why we got you what we finally did. It's so difficult to believe in anything, although I did a paper on this called "Is God Dead?" For a Problems in Modern Living course I took with Dr. Nobinsky, whose main problem at the time was senility--he's dead now--and I called my study "Is God Dead?" Now, the title wasn't very original but I felt I had translated the complex reasons why nobody believes in religion any more. To put it in a nutshell, the reason everyone is so schizophrenic and paranoiac today is because man is finally being able to do what he previously thought only a God could do. So because scientific miracles are all around us, we're searching for more brilliant images to worship. (MOVES TO ANNA.) You don't believe in religion at all?

ANNA

Not since Mr. Fisher's puppy.

(CATHERINE ENTERS AND BEGINS NOISILY DICING A BANANA ON A CUTTING BOARD AT SIDEBBOARD, N.)

FLEUR

Mr. Fisher's puppy?

ANNA

(RISES.) Oh, yes. You know, Mr. Fisher, that nice old man with the gas station on Bay Street? The Mobil station.

FLEUR

I don't use Mobil. I've been going to Gulf at the corner of Clove and Victory. They're giving mugs.

ANNA

Anyway, Mr. Fisher with the Mobil Station had a puppy two years ago and he doesn't have a puppy any more.

(CATHERINE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN.)

FLEUR

(MOVES W. TOWARD FRONT DOOR.) I wonder what could be keeping Bob.

ANNA

(SITS IN CHAIR, S. E.) I was teaching at Jefferson, which was in the other direction from where Catherine was, so I had to depend upon this teacher Faith Farber, a crippled teacher whose father is a Christian Scientist, which is the reason Faith Farber is a cripple--well, Faith Farber was driving me to school, which used to drive me crazy watching her twisted leg search for the gas pedal. (STAMPS HER FOOT SEVERAL TIMES IN IMITATION.)

FLEUR

Oh, my. I should think it would, you poor thing.

ANNA

(RISES, CROSSES TO FLEUR.) I had to watch the road closely because her reflexes are so bad sometimes she used to put on the windshield wipers instead of the brakes . . .

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. W. CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SITS.)
Oh, that could be dangerous . . .

ANNA

(CROSSES TO FLEUR, S.) And we were driving by Mr. Fisher's Mobil gas station when this little puppy comes running right out in front of the car, but we stopped in time.

FLEUR

Thank God.

ANNA

(CROSSES TO N. SIDE OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) And there's this cute little puppy looking at me sitting in Faith Farber's suicide seat, and he's wagging his tail a mile a minute and looking so grateful . . .

FLEUR

(NERVOUSLY EATING ZUCCHINI.) That is cute . . .

ANNA

I'm not finished yet! Because then the puppy decides to go back the way he came, which is right in front of me in the death seat, when this big trailer truck comes zipping along right there, right out my window, and I yelled out, "NO, PUPPY! NO, PUPPY!" And the truck driver sees what's going on and he jams on his brakes, but the front wheels come to a stop right on the back half of this little puppy, squirting his guts across the road. (FLEUR BEGINS TO CHOKE.) I let out a scream and the little puppy is still alive, his legs rammed out toward me, his eyes looking right at me--and he's saying, "Ehhhhhhhh! ehhhhhhhh!" And then the truck moves ahead and the back wheels go right over the puppy's head and paws and the rest of it, and there's only this little wet spot on the road. And Mr. Fisher, old, poor Mr. Fisher, whose wife had died the year before--old Mr. Fisher comes running out of his Mobil service station and he took one look and passed out, banging his head on the concrete. (A PAUSE.) That was the last day I wore crosses. (SITS IN CHAIR, W. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SITS, EATS.)

FLEUR

Oh, my--yes. I need water. Excuse me.

(SHE RUSHES TO THE BAR, N. E., FOR A GLASS OF WATER.
THE DOORBELL RINGS.)

ANNA

Come on in!

(BOB ENTERS. HE IS WEARING A BUSINESS SUIT: HE
MOVES IN A SELF-ASSURED MANNER TO CENTER, FLEUR CROSSES TO
HIM.)

FLEUR

Bob, what took you so long?

ANNA

Do you have my present?

BOB

(BRAYING.) What do you mean what took me so long? Don't
you remember where we had to park this afternoon? (TO ANNA.)
Sure, I got your present.

ANNA

(GRABBING IT FROM HIM AND GOING TO SOFA, S. W. AND SITS.)
This box is pretty small for ten dollars.

CATHERINE

(ENTERING FROM KITCHEN.) Oh, Bob.

BOB

(CROSSES TO CATHERINE, SHAKES HER HAND.) Hi-ya, Catherine,
how the hell are you?

CATHERINE

We were just going to have dessert. Shall I make enough
for you?

FLEUR

(SITS IN CHAIR, S. W. CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) Just
a nibble for me.

ANNA

You'll have to put four kiwis in it then.

CATHERINE

Yes, Anna. Four kiwis.

BOB

(CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.) I'll just fix myself a drink.

FLEUR

(TO ANNA.) We got them at Prussacks. I really hope you like them.

BOB

I was doubled-parked for ten minutes on Richmond Avenue while she was running around like a chicken with her head cut off. And if they think I'm paying thirty-five dollars for that lousy garage downstairs, they're crazy.

(ANNA HAS FINISHED OPENING HER PACKAGE, AND SHE SLOWLY LIFTS OUT A PAIR OF GLOVES.)

FLEUR

I thought something warm . . .

ANNA

(SCREAMING AS SHE THROWS THE GLOVES AND BOX ACROSS THE ROOM.) I don't want them! Get them out of here!

FLEUR

(RISES.) Pardon me?

ANNA

(POINTING AT GLOVES.) Get them out of here.

CEIL

(ENTERING.) The gloves are leather and they're fur-lined.
(SHE CROSSES TO CENTER, PICKS UP GLOVES.) My sister doesn't want anything killed.

CATHERINE

Fleur and Bob, I want you to meet my dear sister, Ceil Adams. Ceil, darling, this is Fleur and Bob Stein. (SHE INDICATES FLEUR AS BOB AND BOB AS FLEUR.)

BOB

How the hell are you?

CEIL

Hello. I'm sorry . . . Anna doesn't care for fur apparel.

ANNA

I hate fur.

BOB

My mother hated fur, too. She said it was a waste of money. You can get a good pair of wool gloves for half that, and they'd be just as good. (HE SITS IN CHAIR, E. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.)

FLEUR

Of course. (SHE CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E., GETS RECEIPT FROM HER PURSE, TAKES RECEIPT TO ANNA.) I've got the receipt, and you can just go back down and get something you would like. (CEIL CROSSES TO CHAIR, W.)

BOB

I told her to get a gift certificate, but no! She had to go running around like a chicken with its head cut off.

FLEUR

Bob, I wish you wouldn't use that expression.

BOB

But it's true; you run around like a chicken with its head cut off.

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO CEIL AT CHAIR, W.) I was going to get flowers . . .

CEIL

It was a very kind gesture, Mrs. Stein. We appreciate it.

FLEUR

Thank you. Mrs. Adams, I'm so very glad to meet you. I had wanted to meet you for months when I found out Catherine was your sister and we lived in the very same apartment building. I think you're one of the most amazing Board of Education superintendents this city has ever had. Whenever they speak of you down at school it's with supreme admiration, and when Mrs. Pentrano told me you were here tonight, I just so much wanted to see you. Of course, I did want to deliver Anna's present on behalf of the Social Committee--she was a magnificent science teacher, she really is--and Catherine is the finest AA I've worked under.

BOB

Fleur, your hypertension is showing.

FLEUR

I wish you wouldn't use that word, Bob. I really do wish you wouldn't.

CEIL

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E.) I didn't get your first name, Mrs. Stein.

FLEUR

(AT CENTER.) It's Fleur. That's French for flower. Think of snow flur-ries. That's the best way to remember it. I'm in Child Guidance, down there with Anna and Catherine--she truly is just a marvelous AA, really! (CATHERINE TOASTS HER.) I'm not a licensed guidance teacher; I'm an acting guidance teacher--

BOB

(RISES.) But the only difference between being an acting guidance teacher and a licensed guidance teacher is she doesn't get the salary she deserves.

FLEUR

Bob, please don't talk like that. It's embarrassing.

BOB

(CROSSES TO DESK, E. AND SITS IN DESK CHAIR.) Look, I'm on the outside of that kooky profession and I've got a right to express by opinion.

FLEUR

(TO CEIL.) He's in glass. In Pawling Glass, the medium-priced glass you probably heard of; not too cheap, not too expensive.

BOB

I've got the Virgin Islands and I make a good buck. I get a little fishing in, too.

FLEUR

He certainly does. He's hardly ever home. (CROSSES TO CEIL.) Actually, Mrs. Adams, you and I should have met a long time ago, since Bob knew your husband at school--they both were at Wagner College together--a special course, didn't you say, Bob? (CATHERINE CROSSES TO BAR.)

BOB

That's what I said. Some weird course in real estate, which I never went into.

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO COFFEE TABLE, S. W. AND SITS ON IT.) Well, I was going out with Bob at that time. We were a late marriage, too, and I think it's a credit to schoolteachers that we don't marry right off the bat--shows we learn something from all those psych courses. Anyway, Bob was commuting all the way to Newark to date me, and since he was such friends with your husband--Edward--I mean, in the same course and all, wouldn't it seem as if we might have double-dated at least? Bob and me and you and Edward?

BOB

Fleur, I told you I hardly knew Edward Adams. We were in this one course together, and we never said one word to each other. I didn't even sit near him.

FLEUR

But still we might have double-dated. The possibility exists.

ANNA

(SITTING FORWARD ON SOFA.) Edward wasn't dating Ceil at that time, so the possibility doesn't exist.

FLEUR

Bob, you said Edward Adams was going out with the Reardon sister when he was in the course with you.

CATHERINE

(GOES OUT QUICKLY TO KITCHEN, HOLDING BACK TEARS.) Anna, if you want this dessert, come out to the kitchen and help me cut up some of this fruit. It's making too much of a mess in here.

ANNA

(TO FLEUR.) Don't finish off the zucchini while I'm gone.
(SHE FOLLOWS CATHERINE INTO THE KITCHEN.)

CEIL

(AFTER SILENCE HAS FALLEN.) Edward was friends with my sister first--and then he married me.

FLEUR

Oh!

BOB

Kept him in the family anyway. (HE LAUGHS, ADDING TO THE EMBARRASSMENT, AND NERVOUSLY OPENS THE FANNY FARMER CANDY BOX WHICH IS NEXT TO HIM. HIS FACE SQUIRMS IN DISBELIEF.) Dear, I think we'd better get going. (RISES, CROSSES W. FLEUR INTERCEPTS HIM, SEATS HIM ON SOFA, S. W., AND SITS BESIDE HIM.)

FLEUR

We have plenty of time. I deliberately allowed time, Bob, and you know that very well. (TO CEIL.) Bob said only the nicest things about Edward Adams, didn't you Bob? He was very creative, I understand. Artistic. What did he finally go into?

CEIL

He's with an oil company. He likes it very much.

FLEUR

One of the more creative departments? Advertising? Art?

CEIL

He's in quality control.

BOB

That's a surprise. Everybody used to think he'd end up in some arty-darty thing.

FLEUR

I'm sure his work is creative, Bob. And you wouldn't really know if it was or not, since you're all business.

BOB

There's nothing wrong with being able to make a buck in business, is there?

CEIL

Your job must be interesting, Mr. Stein. The Virgin Islands are very lovely.

BOB

I make half my money on being sensible. If there was anything artistic in me, I would have been killed off years ago.

FLEUR

I'm sure being in oil and being in glass are two different things.

BOB

I wish you'd stop saying I'm "in glass"! I am not "in glass."

(ANNA ENTERS WITH AN EGG AND OTHER INGREDIENTS TO
SIDEBOARD, N.)

CEIL

(RISES.) It was very nice meeting you. I assume you're going somewhere this evening . . .

ANNA

Our guests are staying for dessert, Ceil

(SHE BREAKS THE RAW EGG INTO THE BLENDER.)

FLEUR

(RISES.) If we leave in fifteen minutes or so, we'll make it to the theater in plenty of time. (CEIL SITS IN DESK CHAIR, E.)

BOB

We're going to an ice show, not "the theater."

FLEUR

I believe it takes place in a theater, Bob. I prefer the mental provocation of Broadway dramas, but my husband falls asleep.

BOB

(RISES.) I'm in the room, so you could refer to me as Bob and everyone will know who you mean. (FLEUR PUNCHES HIS ARM.)

(ANNA GOES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.)

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E. AND SITS. BOB SITS ON SOFA, S. W.) As I wanted to say, Mrs. Adams, I'm in the middle of the guidance exam right now. I had failed it twice before, not the written part--I always pass the written part--but it's the interview that I have trouble with. Those three administrators just sitting across the room firing questions at me--that's the part I fail.

CEIL

The oral? (BOB NODS.)

FLEUR

(RISES.) Yes, the oral. The written is fine--really excellent--but the oral, I just always fail the oral.

BOB

(RISES, CROSSES TO FLEUR.) I'm sure Mrs. Adams don't give

a damn about your oral problems or anything to do with that school after hours. That's one thing I put a stop to in our apartment--no school talk. There's something queer about teachers the way they can't turn it off even in bed. (FLEUR PUNCHES BOB AGAIN, CROSSES TO CENTER.)

(ANNA ENTERS WITH A HANDFUL OF FRUIT FOR THE BLENDER AND CROSSES TO SIDEBBOARD, N.)

FLEUR

Bob, you are embarrassing me.

BOB

Well, it's true. What the hell good are all those goddam paid vacation days you get when you can't even turn it off on a tour of Europe?

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO BOB.) Some people might call it dedication, dear.

BOB

(TO CEIL.) Do you know what my wife had the nerve to say to me . . . ?

ANNA

Her name is Fleur.

BOB

What?

ANNA

Her name is Fleur. You could just say Fleur and since she's in the room we'd all know who you were talking about.

BOB

(CROSSES TO DESK, E., SITS ON IT, LEANS IN TO CEIL.) Do you know what Fleur had the nerve to say to me when we were 12,673 feet up in a cable car over the Alps?

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO SOFA, S. W. AND SITS.) Bob, now you're telling tales yourself out of school.

BOB

. . . 12,673 feet high in the air, three European panoramic countries laying out in front of us--three thousand bucks invest to drag our butts over to this vista of beauty--and she leans over and whispers in my ear (MIMICKING HIS WIFE'S VOICE): "Do you see the little girl in the cable car ahead of us? . . ."

FLEUR

Bob, there's no need for you to . . .

BOB

"Did you see the little girl in the cable car ahead of us because . . . because she looks just like Dorothy Pewkar, the girl I had programmed out of Political Science." The Pewkar girl. Dorothy Pewkar! (RISES.) I mean, that girl--whoever the hell she may be--has got a lot more problems than whether Fleur Stein programmed her out of Political Science, not the least of which is having a name like Dorothy Pewkar. Do you mind if I use your bathroom?

ANNA

(POINTING TO HALLWAY.) It's right through there. (BOB STARTS OUT S. E.)

FLEUR

(RISES.) You don't have to use the bathroom, Bob.

BOB

(STOPS.) Fleur, what the hell do you mean I don't have to use the bathroom? You have methodically and expertly taken control of all choice and behavior in my life except my bladder and bowels.

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E., GETS KEYS FROM PURSE.) Look, here's the key to our apartment. Go back upstairs and use our bathroom.

BOB

I have a key to my own apartment, dear. You may have forgotten but I live there, too--and I pass in and out of the door under my own control. I swear to God you're hyper tonight.

ANNA

Oh, go ahead and use our bathroom. (BOB STARTS OUT.)

FLEUR

Don't mess up the towels.

BOB

(COMES BACK IN.) What the hell did you think I was going to do? Hurl them off the walls?

(HE EXITS DOWN THE HALLWAY, S. E. TO THE BATHROOM.)

FLEUR

He has such faulty manners sometimes.

CEIL

He's probably just anxious to get started--to the theater.

FLEUR

He has some kind of problem left over from his mother.

ANNA

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) The one that hates furs?

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO ANNA.) Do you know he never uses the bathroom in our apartment? We've been married almost nine years and he's never used it. I suspect he uses the one at his office. (ANNA RETURNS TO THE KITCHEN. FLEUR MOVES TO CEIL.) Mrs. Adams, I want to tell you I am very sorry about this whole affair. That's why I really stopped by tonight. You must feel absolutely dreadful, your own sister being accused of doing something sexual with a young adult, but there is no disgrace to it, no disgrace. Every time we discuss it at school there is no disgrace, and you mustn't feel there is. The boy's parents--the McCloud mother and father--were up to school, and the principal and I handled them. They were furious when they first came in, and the mother began to scream at me, and I told her I was only a guidance teacher and that her behavior was quite out of line. Anyway, I think I've talked them out of suing. (ANNA ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN, MILDLY SENSING THE TENSION IN THE ROOM, AND MAKES FINAL PREPARATIONS

AT THE BLENDER, FLEUR SHIFTS TO A STAGE WHISPER, CROSSES TO CHAIR, W. AND SITS.) So instead of that party coming down to school, I told them I'd visit them at their home for our next meeting; it'd be less awkward, although it means extra work for me, but I don't mind.

CEIL

(CROSSES TO CENTER OF LIVING ROOM.) I don't think now is the right time to go into this, Mrs. Stein. It'd be better if you called me at my office on Monday.

FLEUR

I'll be happy to, Mrs. Adams. I just wanted you to know I was doing everything I can on the matter.

CEIL

(MOVES CLOSER TO FLEUR.) Did you understand me, Mrs. Stein?

FLEUR

Oh yes, Mrs. Adams, Yes, indeed.

CATHERINE

(REENTERING FROM THE KITCHEN AND CROSSES TO CENTER.) Where's Bob?

ANNA

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, W. OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) He's in the john. He doesn't use the john in his own apartment.

CATHERINE

Why not?

FLEUR

That's why I was telling Anna before. There's something wrong with all of us, and we're really not to blame for it. The world just got too complex and all our idols came crashing down--just like what happened to the Egyptians and the Romans--I was telling Anna I did a paper on it, showing how the collapse of our modern world is coming about because we've finally reached a point of scientific consciousness which overreaches our former religious goals. (PAUSE OF EMBARRASSMENT.) You know, I used to think I

failed the orals because the interviewers were anti-Semitic, but I checked up on them and they were all Jewish. (CATHERINE CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.; CEIL CROSSES TO SOFA, S. W. AND SITS; ANNA SITS IN CHAIR, W. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE. FLEUR RISES AS BOB ENTERS PUFFING ON A CIGARETTE.) Did you light that cigarette up in their bathroom?

BOB

No, I saw smoke coming out of the hot-water faucet and when I looked, this Kent mentholated filter-tip was rammed up in it. (HE LAUGHS.)

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. W. CORNER OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SITS.) I just don't know why men insist on lighting up cigarettes when they go into a bathroom. My father did the same thing, and I found it revolting.

(FLEUR TAKES A BIG MOUTHFUL OF ZUCCHINI.)

ANNA

Did you know that eating the right combination of vegetables makes your feces odorless?

(FLEUR GAGS, AND CATHERINE TURNS ON THE BLENDER. FINALLY, SHE SHUTS IT OFF.)

CATHERINE

(PEERING INTO THE BLENDER THEN TURNS TO ANNA.) I think we've got the right combination.

(SHE STARTS TO SERVE IT.)

FLEUR

Excuse me, but I have to use the bathroom.

(SHE RUNS DOWN HALLWAY, S. E.)

BOB

(STOPS FLEUR.) Don't mess up the towels! (SHE PUNCHES HIM AND EXITS.) She's so sick it isn't funny. (CROSSES TO SOFA, S. W.) I mean, the Board of Ed is batty, but at least they know enough not to give a bewildered schizo a license. Some nights I lay awake trying to picture what

the hell she guides down there. (CATHERINE FILLS DESSERT DISHES FROM BLENDER.)

CEIL

(RISES.) Mr. Stein, you may not realize it but it takes many years of experience and maturing to be a guidance teacher.

BOB

If she matures much more she's going to be dead! I think they don't give her a regular license 'cause they know she doesn't know what the hell she's doing.

ANNA

(CROSSES TO BOB AND HANDS HIM DESSERT.) Just try a little. It's good for you. (SHE CROSSES TO CHAIR, W. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE, SITS.)

BOB

(STILL FOCUSED ON CEIL.) They have two other guidance teachers down at that school, and they got their licenses and everything. The others get normal maladjusted bastards, but they give Fleur the teenage insane. (HE TAKES A SIP OF HIS DESSERT, AND GAGS.) What the hell is this? (CROSSES TO CENTER.)

ANNA

You don't like it?

BOB

It's rotten! What're you drinking it for?

ANNA

I had rabies, and the doctors want me to build up my system.

BOB

You had rabies? Are you nuts? (ANNA RISES, CROSSES TO KITCHEN COUNTER, W.)

CEIL

(CROSSES TO BOB.) Mr. Stein, if you don't mind. When Fleur comes back I think you'd better leave . . .

BOB

Look, Anna . . . (CROSSES TO CATHERINE.) Catherine, we're sort of friends, I'm not the kind of big phony that can just stand here, making believe I don't know what's going on. (TO ANNA.) I frankly was shocked when Fleur told me what you did.

CEIL

We're not going to discuss the matter, Mr. Stein, and I'm a little shocked your wife was so unprofessional as to discuss it with you.

BOB

That's probably the reason Anna did what she did--because you never felt like discussing. But I'm not no phony. When you pretend things don't exist--that they never happened--it gets worse in the mind, don't it, Anna? (CROSSES TO ANNA, THEN TO CEIL.) There was a teacher who did something like what Anna did when I went to Davidson High. Even when I was thirteen--I was thirteen--and I knew what was wrong with her. She even had a sick mother and do you know where she kept her mother's bed? Right in the middle of the living room. It's no good when all you've got is women around. (CEIL CROSSES TO CHAIR, S. E.; ANNA CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.; CATHERINE CROSSES TO BOB.)

CATHERINE

Bob, would you be courteous enough to shut your big goddam mouth?

BOB

Look, Catherine, I didn't mean to put this on a personal level. What's done is done. I think the two of you could use a little male influence, that's all I'm saying--and then maybe Anna wouldn't have gotten so sick.

CEIL

Anna will be seeing the best doctors, Mr. Stein . . .

BOB

(CROSSES TO CEIL.) Since when are psychiatrists the best doctors? Every one I ever knew was a pervert. Her sister lives next door to one in Perth Amboy who chokes milk bottles and beats his lettuce. All Anna's got to do is get out a little. You've got to get out and meet some men.

FLEUR

(ENTERING TO CHAIR, S. E.) It's a very cheerful bathroom. Those angelfish decals . . .

BOB

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) You know how dumb men are. You just got to go where they are. Jesus Christ, I mean even a neighborhood bar, or get the hell out of teaching and work in advertising or something.

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO BOB.) Bob, Mrs. Adams said . . .

BOB

(TO FLEUR.) Shut up. (TO ANNA.) Sure, there's a lot of pretty boys in that, but if you're just around the same guys long enough, sooner or later one of 'em will notice you and think he loves you and before you know it you'll be married.

FLEUR

Mrs. Adams doesn't want this matter mentioned.

BOB

(CROSSES TO ANNA.) When was the last time you ever went out anywhere, except to some free teacher's luncheon at the French Embassy or some crap like that?

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO W. SIDE OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) Bob, get your ass out of here.

FLEUR

(GETS PURSE FROM CHAIR, S. E., THEN CROSSES TO CLOSET, W. FOR STOLE.) We'd better be going, Bob. You know how you like the overture.

BOB

(TO ANNA. CROSSES TO CENTER OF LIVING ROOM.) Even an ice show? Don't you ever go out and have fun? How the hell are you going to meet any men, sitting around here?

FLEUR

(GOING TO BOB, GRABS HIM.) Bob, let's get out of here . . .

BOB

(SHAKING OFF FLEUR, CROSSES TO ANNA.) Why the hell don't you come along with Fleur and me tonight? Go throw a dress on, and I'll get an extra ticket and we'll go to some cocktail lounge afterward, and I'll get a guy for you. Just someone to talk to. The four of us. Get into the swing of things.

CATHERINE

(ONE STEP TOWARD BOB.) She's not going anywhere. You're the one that's going . . .

FLEUR

Bob, really . . .

BOB

I'll make Fleur lend you her fur . . .

(HE TAKES THE STOLE OFF FLEUR.)

FLEUR

Bob, she doesn't . . .

BOB

(CROSSING BACK TO ANNA.) You're not half bad-looking, Anna, no kidding. You'll look snazzy as hell . . . (SEE FIGURE 3.)

FLEUR

Bob . . . the fur gloves . . . She doesn't care for fur . . .

BOB

(STRETCHING THE STOLE OUT BEHIND ANNA LIKE THE WINGS OF A CONDOR.) You'll knock 'em dead!

(HE DROPS THE STOLE AROUND ANNA'S SHOULDERS. BOB MOVES N. ANNA SHIVERS FROM THE FUR, THEN THROWS THE STOLE TO THE FLOOR AND KICKS IT VIOLENTLY SEVERAL TIMES, MOVING TO CENTER.)



Figure 3

FLEUR

(FINALLY.) She told you she didn't like fur, Bob.

CATHERINE

Would anyone like a little more kiwi frappe?

BOB

(DUMBFOUNDED.) My mother never hated fur that much.
(HE SITS IN CHAIR, N. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.)

CEIL

(SITS IN CHAIR, S. E.) Anna is a vegetarian, Mr. Stein.
She doesn't like animals being killed.

BOB

(HIS AMAZEMENT GIVING WAY TO FURY.) You've got one hell
of a nerve kicking my wife's fur around like that. ONE
HELL OF A NERVE!

FLEUR

(CROSSES TO BOB.) Bob, Mrs. Adams told you she's a
vegetarian . . .

ANNA

(INDICATING FLEUR. CROSSES TO CENTER.) If she wants to
run around with animal corpses hanging all over her, that's
her business. All those beautiful tiny animals raised in
little cages that had to get gassed and have the skin ripped
off their backs so some loud-mouth, hyper slob can squat
on her big fat ass at an ice show. (CROSSES TO COFFEE
TABLE, S.)

FLEUR

She told you she hated furs, Bob . . .

BOB

So you're a vegetarian, eh?

FLEUR

(CROSSES S. TOWARD FRONT DOOR, UP STEPS.) Mrs. Adams
said she was, Bob . . .

BOB

A vegetarian, eh? (CROSSES TO ANNA.) Well, you're demented. You're just one more of those fanatics that pick out one ittzie thing and march around making believe you're not trying to cover up some sick, twisted problem you've got.

FLEUR

Bob!

BOB

What do you think you're wearing on your feet? Those slippers. They're leather, you stupid little fool! You're as inconsistent as the rest of those insane fanatics.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO CENTER.) Don't call my sister a stupid little fool, you schmuck.

ANNA

(SITS ON COFFEE TABLE, S., HOLDING ONE FOOT UP IN THE AIR.) They're Leatherette! You dummy! Leatherette! (SHE ROARS AT HIM.) Ha!

CEIL

(RISES.) Anna, that's enough . . .

BOB

Oh, yeah? How about the top of this cigarette box? That's leather. Leather all over it. I'll bet you didn't notice that. (ANNA LOOKS AT THE CIGARETTE BOX AND CROSSES TO SPARE CHAIR IN DINING ROOM, E. AND SITS.) Inconsistent, that's what you are. Just like all those revolutionaries. You've got animal skins and corpses all over this place, honey, and you'd better learn to live with 'em. And that's one hell of a box of Fanny Farmer candy you've got over there!

CATHERINE

Bob, your mentality isn't in glass, it's in horseshit.

FLEUR

Let's go, Bob. We're going to be late as it is.

BOB

Inconsistency! You can't even see it, can you? I heard how you went around picking up all those goddam cats in Italy. Picking up all those animals and giving 'em a little love; worrying about those little pussy cats starving to death; just hugging and petting 'em and rubbing 'em . . . Jesus Christ, no wonder you're afraid of rabies. That vegetarian crap is only a cover-up for your real problem. You've cut out a whole part of living. You might just as well have sliced off a piece of your body.
(CROSSES TO STEPS, S.)

FLEUR

Bob, Mrs. Adams is my supervisor and you're embarrassing me. I've very embarrassed.

BOB

Oh, embarrass later. She knows what you're here for. (TO ANNA.) You could kick that fur all the way down to Forty-second Street, and everybody's still going to know you're a cripple. You and Catherine. Catherine, I never knew you had such a repulsive mouth.

(THERE IS A TERRIBLE SILENCE.)

CATHERINE

(ONE STEP TO ANNA, THEN SWEETLY.) Anna? Isn't there something in the album you'd like to show Mr. Stein?

(ANNA REMEMBERS THE GUN; STARTS FOR THE ALBUM AT COFFEE TABLE, S. SEE FIGURE 4.)

(BLACKOUT.)

(HOUSE LIGHTS UP.)

Act Three

(HOUSE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK. LIGHTS COME UP ON ENTIRE APARTMENT AS AT END OF ACT TWO.)

(TIME: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING.)

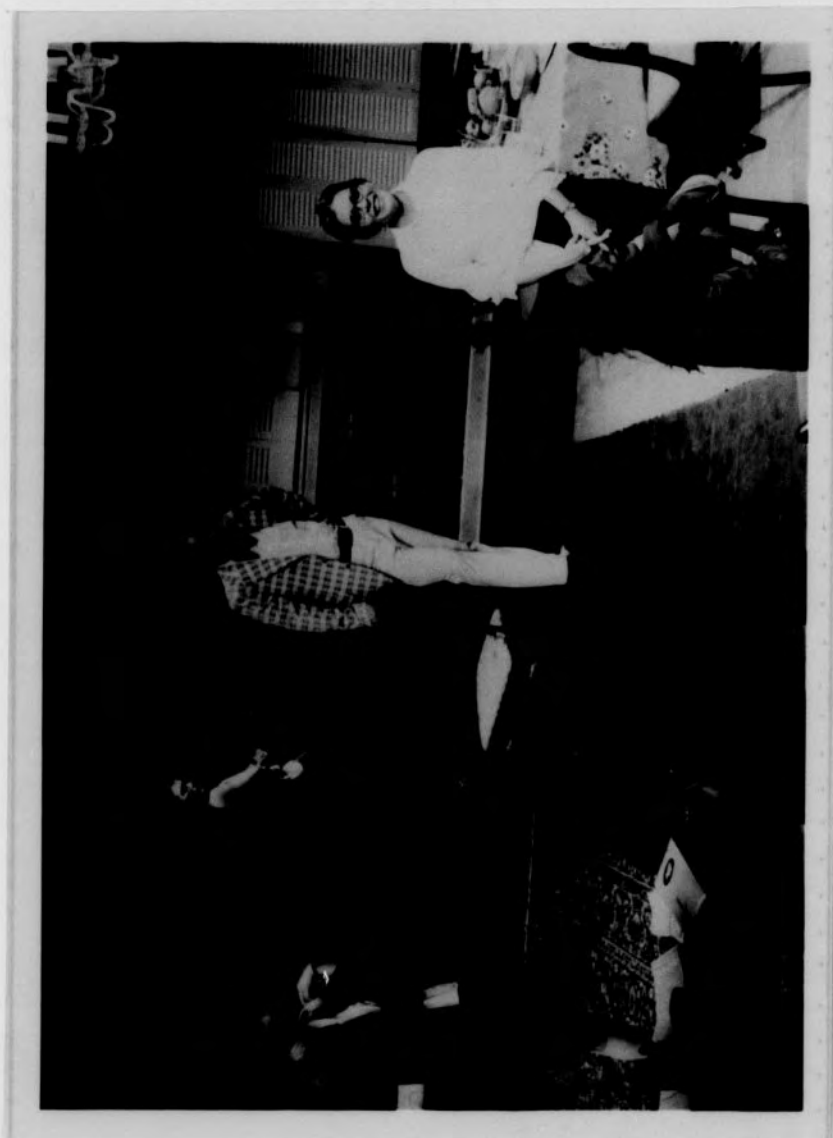


Figure 4

(AT RISE: ANNA IS CROSSING TO COFFEE TABLE, S. W. FOR ALBUM CONTAINING PISTOL.)

BOB

(HIS ARM AROUND CATHERINE.) If you knew how many nights Fleur and I sat up there in our apartment talking about you two, you'd realize we're the best friends you've got in the world. I mean it, Catherine.

CATHERINE

Anna has something to show you in our album, Bob,

ANNA

Yes, Bob. Come here.

BOB

(STAYING WHERE HE IS.) We saw this whole thing coming, Fleur and me. Only, I thought it was going to be you first, Catherine.

CATHERINE

Then it's only the juxtaposition that's disturbed you . . .

BOB

(MOVING TOWARD ANNA, WHO IS HOLDING THE GUN AND ALBUM.) Ceil's the one that had the guts to get away from Mama. She was the biggest lulu, that mother of yours. (ANNA CROSSES TO BOB AS CATHERINE CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.)

ANNA

(POINTING GUN AT BOB.) Look at this, Mr. Stein.

BOB

The best thing that ever happened to the three of you was when she kicked the bucket. (BOB TURNS TO ANNA, SHE FIRES GUN IN HIS FACE. BOB COLLAPSES ON FLOOR.)

FLEUR

Oh, my God!

BOB

(RISES, CHOKING FROM THE SHOCK, GRABBING THE GUN AND SEEING

IT WAS A BLANK.) You crazy goddam fool. You could have burned my eyes. (CROSSES TO CATHERINE.) And you put her up to it. You two are birds of a feather, you are. Two loony birds. (CROSSES TO ANNA.)

FLEUR

Bob . . . it was a jest. I'm sure it was just a jest.

BOB

(RECOVERED FROM THE CHOKING, EXPLODING AT ANNA.) Who the hell do you think you are firing that thing at me, you little sick bitch? You've got problems, girl, real problems.

ANNA

(FURIOUSLY.) I have what?

BOB

Problems. You got real problems.

ANNA

I have problems, eh?

BOB

That's what I said. You don't like to hear that? Problems. You got big problems.

ANNA

(MOVES RIGHT UP TO BOB.) You have a little problems, too, don't you, Mr. Stein? I'm very interested in your problem--the problem about why you never use the bathroom in your own house? Your wife was telling us how you never use your own bathroom--it's been nine years, didn't you say, Fleur?--nine years of not using the bathroom in your own house, so we were wondering if you had a little problem? (SHE TAKES GUN FROM BOB, CROSSES TO DESK, E., SITS IN DESK CHAIR.)

BOB

(EXASPERATED, HE GRABS FLEUR'S HANDBAG.) Give me my goddam ticket. (HE FINDS THE TICKETS AND TAKES ONE AND STARTS OUT FRONT DOOR, S. W.) I'm going outside, and I'll wait exactly three minutes, and if you're not out of this nut

house by then, I'm leaving without you. (EXITS OUT FRONT DOOR, S. W.)

FLEUR

I'll be right down.

BOB

(REENTERS FROM FRONT DOOR, S. W.) You know, when I first heard what you did down at that school I didn't believe it, but now I do! (HE STORMS TOWARD THE DOOR, OPENS IT, THEN PAUSES. ALMOST TREMBLING, HE TURNS AROUND AND FACES THEM.) Do you want to know why I don't use the bathroom in our apartment? Do you really want to know? Well, I'm going to tell you. I don't like using our bathroom because everything in that bathroom my wife steals from the Board of Education. That's why!

FLEUR

Bob . . . (SHE CROSSES TO CHAIR, W.)

BOB

You know that attache case my wife runs around with, like a chicken with her head cut off? She only drags it around so every time she goes to the ladies' room at that school she loads up on paper towels, soap, and toilet paper.

FLEUR

Oh, my God . . . (CROSSES TO CENTER, HIDING FACE.)

BOB

She also steals the sugar and salt from the teacher's lunchroom--as well as so many paper napkins she keeps her mother in napkins--she packs that attache case up with so much crap sometimes I have to help her carry the loot out of the goddam car.

FLEUR

(MOVES TO BOB.) Bob, do you realize what you're saying?

BOB

So, I'll tell you why I don't use the bathroom in our apartment. I don't use our bathroom because I don't like drying my hands with brown, stiff paper towels, I don't like

washing my face with Twenty Mule Team Borax, I don't like taking a bath in Fels-Naphtha, and I don't like using toilet tissue that has a texture like sandpaper to wipe my ass!

(HE EXITS FRONT DOOR, S. W., SLAMMING THE DOOR.)

FLEUR

(AFTER A LONG SILENCE.) I don't know what to say. (A PAUSE. SHE CROSSES TO STEPS, S.) Almost nothing of what he said is true. He always did have such a good imagination that he exaggerates and distorts so much that his lies seem true. I don't know whether he's just jealous of the fact that I make more money than he does. He's only an assistant district manager, and he doesn't work on commissions. Maybe I should have quit my job when we married--maybe it would have made him work harder. He's hardly ever home . . . (SHE IS ON THE VERGE OF CRYING.) Mrs. Adams, it's been a pleasure meeting you . . . (SHE PAUSES; BEGINS TO FIND STRENGTH, CROSSES TO CEIL.) I really did want you to know I was doing everything I could with the McCloud parents. They seem to trust me and I think I can stop them from suing. I know I could, if you'd agree to put Anna away . . . for treatment. They're insisting on that . . .

CATHERINE

Beat it, Fleur!

FLEUR

(GETTING STRONGER.) I'm working extra hard on the case. I even agreed to those extra sessions at their home. I'll keep it out of the school. I haven't told anyone except Bob. No one down there knows the details. And I just thought, Mrs. Adams, if you could remember me down at the Board . . . about my license . . . (ALMOST DEMANDING.) It would be wonderful of you, Mrs. Adams. Very wonderful.

(CATHERINE TURNS ON THE BLENDER. FLEUR EXITS FRONT DOOR, S. W. AND CATHERINE HALTS THE BLENDER.)

CEIL

(CROSSING TO CENTER.) Anna, go to your room and lie down.

ANNA

Go to your own goddam room!

CEIL

Tell her to leave us alone.

CATHERINE

Now, sis, it is a bit tardy for disciplinary procedures.

CEIL

Catherine . . .

ANNA

Oh, Ceil . . . Can't you remember all the fun when we were just getting started as teachers? (SHE CROSSES TO CATHERINE.) How we'd all come running home at three o'clock, and Mama'd have the water boiling and some kind of pie made with Flako pie-crust mix? And Mama'd be dying to know what happened in school all day, and we'd be dying to tell her--and we'd sit around this same table and almost pass out laughing? We'd tell Mama what was going on in the schools, and she wouldn't believe it. She'd say the whole world was going crazy. Remember when I told her about little Gracie Ratinski, that nutty kid with bugs in her hair at Jefferson who used to come into the cafeteria and sing her lunch order out at the top of her lungs? "Give me a peanut butter sandwich, tra la. Give me a peanut butter sandwich, tra la." Don't you remember that? Don't you?

CATHERINE

I remember. I remember, all right. And remember how much Mama laughed when I told her about Rose Anadale, the principal at P. S. 26 who kept the parakeet in her office . . .

ANNA

She used to talk about it on the P. A. system every morning after The Star-Spangled Banner . . .

CATHERINE

She'd announce to the whole school, remember: "Good morning, children . . . Good morning, children . . . Little Polly and I hope you have a wonderful day."

ANNA

(CATHERINE AND ANNA HOWL, BUT IT IS OBVIOUS THAT CATHERINE IS WATCHING THE EFFECT ON CEIL.) Don't you miss telling Mama those stories? Don't you miss it?

CEIL

(CROSSES TO S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) Tell her to leave us alone.

CATHERINE

Look, Ceil, it's late--you probably have to get up early tomorrow and appoint a committee to study the salient factors of some nonsense or other . . .

CEIL

If that's the way you want it . . . (SHE CROSSES TO DESK, E. FOR BRIEFCASE.) I've made arrangements . . . (OPENING FOLDER.)

CATHERINE

(NOISILY CLEARING TABLE.) You don't say. They are floral, aren't they?

CEIL

She's going to a hospital.

CATHERINE

No kidding. Far away? Tudor or Swiss? Mountains and view of lake? No, don't tell me the best feature. It's state-supported.

CEIL

All you have to do is get her packed.

ANNA

She's the one that needs a rest, Catherine. She's very tired. Very tired and very sick.

CEIL

(TAKING PAPERS OUT OF HER BRIEF CASE.) You have to look at these, Catherine.

CATHERINE

(SLAMMING A BOWL DOWN ON THE SIDEBOARD, N. WITH A RESOUNDING NOISE.) Don't tell me what I have to do.

(THERE IS LONG SILENCE; FINALLY.)

ANNA

Ceil, didn't you ever love us? Mama? Any of us?

CEIL

(CROSSES TO S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE.) Our lives are not around this table any more.

ANNA

Oh I must have forgotten. (SHE CROSSES TO CENTER OF LIVING ROOM.) This is all dead now, isn't it? Silent. The voices gone. Even the whispering forgotten: "Straighten up . . . careful your slip isn't showing . . . skirt down . . . knees close together. Be careful if someone sits next to you--or across the way. Beware of your eyes . . . He mustn't think you're looking at him. Even when you're . . . bleeding, he'll know. He'll try to find a way . . . to force you apart . . . to cut into you . . ." (CEIL CROSSES TO DESK, E.) And the sounds--you must have forgotten the sounds in the dark of our rooms . . . the quieting of the wounds by which we could be tracked. (CROSSES VERY CLOSE TO CEIL.) Tell me what you and Edward do. Does he actually manage to get on top and ride you like some blubbery old nag?

(FURIOUSLY, CEIL GRABS THE FANNY FARMER BOX AND SMEARS THE CHOPPED MEAT INTO ANNA'S FACE. ANNA FALLS TO HER KNEES, SENSES THE MEAT, AND SCREAMS AS THOUGH BATHED IN SPIDERS. SHE RUNS OUT OF THE ROOM, DOWN THE HALLWAY, S. E. CATHERINE TRIES TO GO AFTER ANNA.)

CEIL

(CROSSING IN FRONT OF CATHERINE, CENTER OF LIVING ROOM.) She can wash herself.

(CEIL PHYSICALLY STOPS CATHERINE FROM PASSING.)

CATHERINE

Get out of my way!

CEIL

How the hell much longer did you think you could go on keeping her here?

CATHERINE

As long as I want, that's how long.

CEIL

Why? So you won't be alone? (CATHERINE CROSSES TO S. END OF DINING ROOM TABLE, CEIL FOLLOWS.) After all the filth and wisecracks are scraped off is that what's underneath?

CATHERINE

(RINGING THE BUFFET BELL.) School's over. Everybody's dismissed.

(CEIL YANKS THE BELL OUT OF CATHERINE'S HAND.)

CEIL

Don't you think I need anything?

CATHERINE

I thought you always took everything you needed.

CEIL

Anything I did you made me do after the years of gnawing at me--you and her and Mama. The whole pack of you. For what? What was it you hated so much?

CATHERINE

(CROSSING TO CENTER OF LIVING ROOM.) I'll tell you what and I'll tell you when! You see, there was this big hole in the ground, with you on one side of it and me on the other--and we were watching them stick a coffin in the ground. But as it was going down I had to shut my eyes because I'll tell you all I could see: I saw you with a lawyer making sure the few bucks of a croaking old lady were transferred to your name. And I was admiring a casket you picked out that wouldn't waste a second getting her corpse back to ashes. And I remembered when that imperfect gasping woman was dying how you made certain you didn't have to touch a penny in your bank account. (SHE MOVES TO DESK, E. AND SITS IN DESK CHAIR.)

CEIL

(CROSSING TO CENTER.) That's not what you hated me for all your life! Anything you didn't like you could have done

differently. Anything! You're not going to blame me for that or anything about your sick little life. You didn't have to follow me--let me do everything. I didn't bend anybody's arm. You could have lived your own lives, you know. You didn't have to feed on me all the time!

CATHERINE

(LEAPS UP.) Get out of here.

CEIL

(CROSSES TO CATHERINE.) What is it deep down in your gut you so detest about me? That I haven't gone mad or become an obscene nasty witness? That's what you are, Catherine.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO SOFA, S. W.) You know, Ceil--the way you said that--I mean, you're louder and crueller--but there's a part of you that's just like Mama. I think that's the part of you I've always despised.

(CATHERINE TURNS AWAY. CEIL GETS HER COAT FROM THE CLOSET AND GATHERS UP THE PAPERS, THE GUN AND THE ALBUM, ENDING UP ON STEPS, S.)

CEIL

I'll call you in the morning.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO BAR, N. E.) Not in the morning, if you don't mind. You see, Miss Reardon drinks a little and she'll be sleeping off a colossal load.

CEIL

(THROWING THE ALBUM, GLOVES AND PAPERS TO THE FLOOR.) Here! Here's everything. I'm not going to let you pin the rap on me or Mama or anybody any more. Now it's up to you. For once in your life, you pick up the pieces however the hell you want. But no matter what you do, let me tell you this: You're not going to drag me down. Not at this stage of the game, my sweet sisters. Not at this stage of the game. (SHE EXITS FRONT DOOR, S.)

ANNA

(ENTERING FROM HALLWAY, S. E., CROSSING TO CHAIR, S. END OF

DINING ROOM TABLE AND SITS.) You're worse than all of them. You never do anything to stop the destruction.

CATHERINE

I got rid of her. What else do you want from me?

ANNA

You're godless and you're killing all of us. Everything.

CATHERINE

(CROSSES TO ANNA.) Look, I'm warning you. I'm going shopping tomorrow and I'm buying roast beef, frankfurters, liverwurst, knockwurst, and two pounds of Virginia ham. It may sound primitive but it sure as hell's going to be delicious.

ANNA

Catherine--sometimes . . . sometimes I see my reflection in a window . . . or look down at my hand resting in my lap, and I see her. Mama. She's inside of me. She frightens me, Catherine. She makes me afraid. I look out the window . . . the telephone poles in the street . . . she makes me see them as dead crucifixes. I'm losing my mind. I can't stop myself. She's at my throat now. Catherine, she's strangling me. Help me. Oh, God, help me . . .

(SHE PUTS HER HEAD ON THE TABLE.)

CATHERINE

(PAUSES, GOES TO THE HALL AND TURNS OFF THE FOYER LIGHT. PICKS UP CEIL'S FOLDER CONTAINING COMMITMENT PAPERS, CROSSES TO SOFA, S. W.) Everyone's going crazy, Anna, do you know that? The dentist--I went to the new dentist down the street--I went three weeks ago for my first appointment, and then last week, and then yesterday. He wears three wigs, Anna. On the first visit he was wearing a crew-cut wig. Last week he had a medium-length wig. And yesterday he had this fuzzy llama-wool wig and he kept saying, "Dear me, oh, dear me--I've got to get a haircut . . ." And next week I know he'll have the crew-cut job on again. (SHE TEARS UP PAPERS, CROSSES TO ANNA. ALL LIGHTS FADE OUT EXCEPT SPECIAL ON ANNA.)

ANNA

(RAISING HER HEAD AS CATHERINE REACHES HER.) Catherine--

what world were we waiting for? (SEE FIGURE 5.)

(SLOW FADE OUT.)

(HOUSE LIGHTS UP.)



Figure 5

CHAPTER III

CRITICAL EVALUATION

The audience response to And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little and the brisk ticket sales after the opening night brought about the addition of an extra performance bringing the total number of performances to ten. The extended length of the run added an extra challenge to the cast in terms of maintaining a freshness in their performances in spite of the extraordinarily demanding nature of their roles. Throughout the rehearsal and performance periods the work of the cast and the technical crews was of high quality, although there were some exceptions which will be pointed out in this chapter.

The final part of this thesis analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the production as this director sees them. It places emphasis on audiences, technical challenges, acting achievements and the play itself.

Audience Response

The popularity and warm critical response to the production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little came as an enormous and pleasant surprise. Weaknesses of the script, the unpleasant nature of the story, and the uncomfortable seating on Taylor Stage was detrimental, but audience

response was so cordial that a curtain call was added at the third performance.

The critical response was equally warm. Joe Knox who reviewed the production for the Greensboro Daily News stated:

The last play of UNC-G's 52nd season, "And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little" by Paul Zindel, is a highly polished, beautifully performed jewel, at once uproariously funny, quietly amusing, touching, saddening and tragic.

I thought the opening performance Monday night was as fine as any I had ever seen in Taylor theatre. Produced by a drama department notable for excellence over the years, 'Miss Reardon' certainly ranks among the best.²⁸

Doug Waller in his review for the Greensboro Record criticized the play itself but said:

Nevertheless, Zindel has provided us with some good theatre. His acerbic lines and sharp wit produce some excellent comedy which was played to its fullest Monday night under the direction of Jim Fisher.

Also, Katherine Cortez, Mary Faran Huey and Darian Harris--the three sisters--made their characters fascinating.²⁹

Technical Areas

The set designer and lighting director for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little were both undergraduates. This was, at the same time, a strength and a weakness in the overall production design.

²⁸Greensboro Daily News, 9 April 1975.

²⁹Greensboro Record, 8 April 1975.

The major strength was that the designers had great enthusiasm and drive in their work and a willingness to cooperate totally with the director. The major weakness was the lack of production experience of both the designers in terms of their expertise and professional maturity. This director, not totally at home in the technical aspects of a production (especially in the area of lighting) found it difficult at times to guide the less experienced designers in areas he was not particularly strong in himself. However, this director feels that any errors in judgment on the technical aspects of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little were minor and did not detract greatly from the final production.

The Setting

While selecting the bill of plays for UNC-G's fifty second season, the faculty decided that one play should be staged in arena style. This was assigned to the production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little and not left to the director to decide. This posed several problems for this director and the set designer. The setting needed to indicate two rooms (living room and dining room) or one combined room. Much of the action of the play takes place around the dining room table and this director felt that because the production was to be done in three-quarter arena style that it was imperative to have a setting in

which the action could be pulled away from the dining room table as much as possible. This led to the decision to make two rooms connected by a large imaginary archway. The designer and director also felt that two rooms would give infinitely more variety and make a more interesting set. The dining room area with swinging doors into a partially visible kitchen was the more effective of the two rooms in this director's opinion. The living room was a little too large and some of the crosses seemed rather long. The foyer containing the front door worked well for several important but difficult entrances and exits.

The treatment of the walls of the set was most attractive in the dining room side where the designer made use of a white wallpaper pattern on a greenish-blue background with white woodwork. The appearance of the living room was less successful with walls that were a light blue color with maple woodwork. The walls were spattered with a darker shade of blue which was insufficient to dull the over-brightness of the basic light blue. Neither room had any indication of aging or wear. Considering that the Reardons had lived in this apartment for at least forty years, this was clearly a flaw in the set design. This director had wanted the set to give the appearance of a realistic setting for a contemporary comedy, but the rooms looked as though they had been painted recently, too clean and bright to be believable.

A Persian carpet in the living room and a light green carpet in the dining room were effective in color and looked well with the furnishings in both rooms.

Properties and accessories were especially well chosen for the production. The action of the play demanded a meal to be prepared, served and eaten and this was extremely well handled by the props crew and the actors. This director had hoped there would be more clutter throughout the set to indicate that the Reardons had been living there for a long time.

The Costumes

The costumes for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little generally worked quite well for the characters. The costume for Catherine was probably the most effective, a simple white blouse and plain navy blue skirt which gave her a rather prim look, perfectly opposite of what Catherine proves herself to be. A concession was made by this director concerning the pale, faded blue robe for Anna which was appropriate for the character but blended in with the background of the set. The costume designer had difficulty in finding a robe that suited the actress, the character, and met the need for a large pocket for concealing the pistol that Anna fires at Ceil, and later at Bob. Ceil's chic, sophisticated brown suit was very attractive and correct for the character, but could have been improved if the skirt

had not been made to look so baggy. The tasteless, overdressed look for Fleur and Bob worked well, but was, perhaps, a bit too extreme and too comic. Fleur's costume was the better of the two in the opinion of this director because it suited the actress and was more subtle than Bob's costume. Mrs. Pentrano's brightly colored tent dress and tattered grey sweater were perfect for the gushy landlady and the delivery boy's blue jean jacket and pants and butcher's apron were right.

Lighting

Probably the most effective thing about the lighting for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was that the acting area was well illuminated with a minimum of light spill on the audience. This director felt that this was quite important to give the audience some feeling of distance from the action of the play. A problem in other productions done in the arena style on Taylor stage has been excessive light spill on the first several rows of seating area, but the problem was greatly diminished in this production. Otherwise, this director felt that there were not enough changes in light levels throughout the course of the play. The light was bright and strong and generally stayed that way. More distinct changes in light levels could have helped to mold the mood of many scenes. What partially caused this problem was that the lighting equipment was inoperable during the technical rehearsals because most of

the dimmers were blown and some replacement equipment had to be borrowed at the last minute from another theatre.

The one major lighting effect, the final special on Catherine and Anna, worked well but this director wishes that the cue had not been faded in during Catherine's final cross to Anna. This director had hoped that Catherine could complete her cross, Anna could deliver the final line of the play, and then the special would appear. The lighting designer indicated that this change would be too abrupt and would then be distracting instead of effective. This director agreed and the special was faded in during Catherine's cross. The effect of this special was excellent in setting a final image of Catherine and Anna that was visually pleasing in setting a final image for the play.

The Acting

Joe Knox in his review of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little in the Greensboro Daily News said,

The five women and two men assembled for the difficult task of making "Miss Reardon" come alive, were talented, sensitive and understanding to an extraordinary degree of their respective roles.³⁰

This director would agree with that statement generally although there were problems obvious and not so obvious to the audience. It was certainly true that the acting in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was one of the most highly praised

³⁰Greensboro Daily News, 9 April 1975.

aspects of the production. This was as it should be because of the nature of the play and this director's feeling that the play was basically one of character study. The rehearsal period was four weeks long and the cast worked very hard to achieve a high level of reality in hopes of making up for some of the play's obvious flaws. With one exception the cast worked with diligent professionalism and toward improvement of their individual acting skills and forming a strong ensemble for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little.

The role of Catherine Reardon was, in this director's opinion, the most successful characterization in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little. This director had worked with the actress playing Catherine twice prior to the production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little and had been able to form a strong working relationship with her. The actress has a desire for perfection and an expertise that this director found a constant challenge as in previous productions. This actress had a tendency to overdo in emotional roles and the greatest hurdle to overcome in her performance was maintaining a control over her desire to "let it all go" emotionally. This director felt that the character of Catherine would be most effective if her emotions boiled under a surface of coolness until her gradual intoxication began releasing them slowly until the final torrent in the climactic scene with Ceil in the third act. One way of

achieving this was through the use of the typical spinster school-teacher image of primness in Catherine's appearance contrasting with her coarse actions which would become more evident during the play.

The first act, particularly the long expository scene with Ceil, was the most difficult for the actress playing Catherine because it was virtually a monologue containing many tongue-twisting phrases and speeches. The actress was performing it well early in the rehearsal period and had to work hard at maintaining a freshness and spontaneity with it.

During the third week of the rehearsal period an experiment was attempted to aid the actress portraying Catherine in playing the character's gradual intoxication. Real alcoholic beverage was used (Scotch whiskey at the first of these rehearsals, wine at the second) which the actress drank in the prescribed amounts that the character drank during the course of the play. The first rehearsal was not good. The actress drank too large quantities of the Scotch too quickly and became too intoxicated to be even coherent. The second such rehearsal was more successful, and although the actress again became intoxicated, this director was able to take careful notes on her reactions, movements, and speech which helped her at subsequent rehearsals and in her finished performance.

The role of Anna Reardon was also well-acted in the opinion of this director. The actress brought a highly emotional quality to the character of Anna which was at times a bit out of control, but more often fascinating to watch. Generally, having seen this actress in stiff, mechanical performances prior to And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, this director was particularly pleased with her performance. Her extremely youthful appearance was a problem as was her graceful, dancer-like movement, but she was able to bring enough emotional believability to her character to compensate for these weaknesses. The actress was also able to form a strong working relationship with the actress playing Catherine and the interaction between these two characters was a high point of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little. The two were able to maintain a steady tension and bond even when they were not directly relating to each other in a scene, and when they were left alone together during the play's final moments, the full effectiveness of their relationship became quite clear. These two characters were certainly the most important in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little and created the strongest performances in the production.

The third sister, Ceil, was less well-played by an experienced and quite competent actress who gave an inconsistent performance and proved to be difficult in her relationships with this director and the remainder of the cast.

She seemed determined to never play a scene the same way twice in a role that actually supports the action and she did entirely too much to try to take the focus of a scene at the wrong time. This director tried to make these points clear to the actress who chose to ignore the advice and do as she pleased which hurt the production and the feeling of ensemble that was achieved among the others in the cast. However, the actress' physical appearance was appropriate for Ceil. She also played many moments quite well, especially one scene with Anna in the first act when they discuss their deceased mother and Anna's nightmares. The weakest side of her performance was her "listening." Instead of paying attention to what was being said and reacting to it she constantly did distracting pieces of business (playing with stray threads, waving her napkin around, playing with her food, posing) which hurt emphasis of important moments in many scenes.

One experiment was attempted with the character of Ceil that helped a moment become more believable. Near the end of the first act Anna unexpectedly fires a blank gun directly at Ceil. This director staged the moment so that Ceil would jump up from her seat when fired at. In hopes of finding out if this was a realistic reaction, this director ordered that the gun be loaded with blanks and fired at the actress during a rehearsal when she did not

expect it. Instead of leaping from her seat, she sat stunned and then burst into tears. This is how that scene was subsequently played.

This director made a serious mistake in directing the actress playing Fleur and, to a lesser extent, the actor playing Bob. Both actually gave generally good performances although there was a lack of depth and a lesser degree of believability than achieved by the others in the cast. In part this was due to the characters themselves as written, and also to the fact that the actor and actress were cast very much against type, but mostly to the fact that this director coached them on a one-dimensional level. In coaching the actor and actress this director made them force their performances which contributed greatly to the weaknesses of their characterizations.

The actress portraying Fleur had an adequate degree of experience, but not much in the area of comedy, although she displayed a natural flair for it. This director was concerned with her lack of expertise in regard to playing the comic moments of her character and coached her extensively in comic technique with the result that most of her comic moments were forced. She played Fleur's more serious moments, especially her final tearful scene excellently.

The actor playing Bob generally did well with the coarseness and humor of his character, but was perhaps a

little too comic to be believed completely. However, many of his moments with Fleur and several with Ceil were strongly played.

A controversial aspect of the production was the use of a New York (Brooklynese) accent by the characters Fleur and Bob. The actress playing Fleur was able to master the accent quite well, although it was entirely too forced and pronounced. The actor playing Bob has less affinity for mastering the accent partially because of the natural slowness of his own speech. More success in this area might have been achieved had the two actors been able to both have the same consistency with the accent. This director felt that attempting the accent was right, but that the proper result was not reached.

The characters of Mrs. Pentrano, the landlady, and the delivery boy were well-played. The actress portraying Mrs. Pentrano was amusing and was able to make use of an annoying laugh for comic effect. The actor playing the delivery boy had just the right smart-aleck quality without being overdone. Both of these actors worked diligently on their roles even though they were both onstage briefly and this director was pleased with their performances.

Final Thoughts

The production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was a very satisfying experience. Although this director initially had not liked the play and was not excited with

the idea of directing it in arena style, once rehearsals began the challenge was a valuable and enjoyable one. Because this director felt that the script was not a very good piece of dramatic literature, aside from some snappy dialogue and well-drawn characters, the challenge of making adjustments in the structure of the play became necessary and exciting. The most notable of these changes was also the most effective. This was the moment at the end of the third act when Catherine and Anna are left together, Catherine with Anna's committment papers in hand. Instead of leaving the audience undecided as to what will become of Anna, this director chose to make the decision clear through Catherine. She slowly and painfully tore up the committment papers which indicated that she did not intend to allow Anna to be committed to a mental institution and that the only way this would happen was if Ceil were to take charge again. This change was accepted well by the cast and the audience, even by those who knew how the play was written to end.

This director was pleased with the response to the production and felt that much was achieved in his development as a theatre artist and in the development of the cast and crews.

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APPENDIX A

